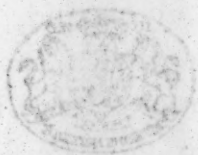




TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
The EARL of
CASTLEHAVEN.



My LORD,



UTY and Gratitude for the Favours, I have formerly received from Your Noble Family, naturally lead me to consecrate this first Attempt of mine, of this Kind, to Your LORDSHIP. On reading *MEROPE*, which the great Name of *VOLTAIRE* induced me to do, I was so charm'd with it's Distresses,

and interesting Incidents, that I could not help trying the little Powers, I was Master of, in rendering this entertaining Piece into *English*. How happily I have succeeded in it, is now submitted to the Public. However, I am not displeased with the Labour, bestow'd upon it ; as it furnishes me with an Opportunity of paying these Respects to your LORDSHIP.

The Intimacy, the EARL, your Father, condescended to honour me with for several Years, allow'd me frequent Occasions of contemplating Your LORDSHIP's native Talents very early. I saw Them in their Bud ; saw Them, from time to time, open, and expand, Themselfes; and, cultivated all along with the utmost Care and Diligence, hastening every Day towards that Degree of Bloom, and Perfection, which renders Them at present the Object of universal Admiration.

I am often wont to call to mind the happy Hours I have spent at HATCH ; and the Conversations and Intercourses, I was indulged in by the late EARL of CASTLEHAVEN. Give me leave, My LORD, to say, that Your Noble Father, tho' He chose Retirement, was every way qualified for great Employments: had a fine Genius ;

nus ; a great Delicacy of Taste for polite Literature ; was quick and penetrating ; in respect of Parts and Capacity, had not many Equals ; in point of true Honour and Integrity, no Superior.

No less, than a Personage of these distinguish'd Endowments was Your LORDSHIP's Tutor. Yes, My LORD ! I was often a Witness of the Delight He took in super-intending Your Education ; of the refined and exalted Sentiments He would take all Occasions of instilling ; the excellent Precepts He daily inculcated ; sparing no Pains to form the darling Hopes of his Great and Ancient Family on his own accomplish'd Model. And it is Your LORDSHIP's peculiar Happiness to copy after such a consummate Original. So that, the high Honours, You derive from a long Train of ennobled Ancestors, are no ways like to be diminish'd in their Lustre ; but will be transmitted bright and shining to Posterity, as You Yourself received Them from Your Illustrious Father.

But, not to let my Zeal for Your LORDSHIP's Glory transport me beyond just Bounds ; and intrude on those Hours, You have establish'd as a Rule to employ more importantly, I

haste to conclude this duteous Address ; after breathing one pious Wish, that there may not be wanting, at a due Period of Time, a noble Progeny, sprung from your own Loins, to perpetuate the Virtues of your August House ; and assuring Your LORDSHIP, that I am, with the greatest Veneration and Attachment,

My LORD,

Your LORDSHIP's most Obedient,

And most Devoted, Humble Servant,

John Theobald.



To the Marquis

SCIPIO MAFFEI,

Author of the *Italian* MEROPE, and several other celebrated Works.

THOSE, from whom the Moderns, both *Italians*, and other Nations, have borrowed all their Learning, the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, were accusom'd to address their Works, without any vain Formality, to their Friends, and Persons distinguish'd in Arts and Sciences.

'Tis upon the same Grounds, I pay you this Homage of the *French-Merope*.

The *Italians*, who have been the Restorers of almost all the Liberal Arts, and the Inventors of some others, were the first, who, under the Eyes of *Leo X*, revived Tragedy. And you are the first, Sir, who, in this Age, in which the Art of *Sophocles* began to be too much enervated by Love-Intreagues, oft foreign to the Subject, or debased by ridiculous Buffooneries, which were a Dishonour to the Taste of your ingenious Nation; you are the first, I say, who have had the Courage, and the Talents, to give us a Tragedy, free from Gallantry; a Tragedy, worthy of the glorious Days of *Athens*; in which the whole Plot turns upon the Love of a Mother, and where the most tender Interest springs from the purest and most refined Virtue.

France prides itself in *Athalie*. 'Tis the principal Performance our Stage knows; and, indeed, a consummate Piece of Poetry. 'Tis, of all the Theatre exhibits, the only Play, wherein Love is not introduced; and, besides, 'tis supported by the Pomp of Religion, and the majestic Eloquence of the Prophets.

You have not recurr'd to this Resource; notwithstanding which, you have supplied a long Career of five Acts, which it is so prodigiously difficult to fill up without Episodes.

I confess, your Subject seem'd to me to be much more interesting, and tragical, than that of *Athalie*. And, if our
admirable

admirable *Racine* had set off his Master-piece with more Pomp and Poetry, I make no Question, but that it had drawn pretty near as many Tears, as your's did.

Alexander's Master, *Aristotle*, that extensive Wit, so just, and so penetrating into Things, that were at that Time within the Reach of Human Capacity, *Aristotle*, in his immortal Art of Poetry, does not hesitate to say; that the Meeting of *Merope* and her Son, was the most interesting Touch of all the *Greek* Scene. He gave to this Stroke of the Stage the Preference above all others. *Plutarch* tells us, that the *Greeks*, that so sensible People, us'd to shrink with Fear, lest the old Man, who was to stop *Merope's* Hand, should not arrive Time enough to do it. This Piece, which was play'd in his Time, and of which we have very few Fragments left, was, in his Opinion, the most moving of all the Tragedies of *Euripedes*. But the great Success of *Euripedes* was not entirely owing to the Choice he made of a Subject; though, in every Case, a good Choice goes a great way.

It has been treated several times in *France*; but without Success. Perhaps the Authors loaded the Subject, so simple in itself, with foreign Ornaments. They sought the naked *Venus* of *Praxiteles*, to cover her with Tinsel. It would take up a great deal of our Time, to beat it into Persons, that, in all grand Subjects, one must recur to what is natural and simple.

In 1641, when the Stage began to flourish in *France*, and to be raised even far above That of *Greece*, by the Genius of *P. Corneille*, Cardinal *Richlieu*, who pursued all Kinds of Glory, and directed the Building of the great Saloon at the *Palais Royal*, for the Representation of Pieces, the Plan of which he had himself sketch'd out, order'd a *Merope* to be there play'd, under the Name of *Telefont*. There were in it about a hundred Lines of his own composing: the rest were the Production of *Colletet*, *Bois-Robert*, *Démarets*, and *Chapelain*. But all the Cardinal's Power could not instill into these Writers the Genius they wanted. Perhaps, he himself had none for the Stage, tho' he was not without a Taste: and all that he could, or was incumbent on him to do, was to encourage the great *Corneille*.

Monf. *Gilbert*, Resident of the famous Queen *Christina*, in 1643, exhibited his *Merope*, as much out of Date at this Day,

Day, as its Author. *Jean de la Chapelle*, of the French Academy, Author of a *Cleopatra*, play'd with some Success, brought his *Merope* on the Stage, in 1683. He did not fail to stuff his Piece with an Episode of Love. He complains likewise, in his Preface, that they objected to him too much of the Marvellout. But he was under a Mistake; it was not this Marvellous, that damn'd his Work: 'twas, in Effect, his Want of Genius, and the Poorness of his Versification: for this is the grand Point, this the egregious Fault, that ruins so many Pieces of Poety. The Art of being Eloquent in Verse, is of all Arts the most difficult, and the most rare. One may meet with a thousand Men of Genius, that know how to dispose a Work, and can versify after a Fashion: but to treat a Subject truly poetically, is a Talent imparted only to three or four Mortals on the Face of the whole Earth.

In the Month of *December*, 1701, *Monf. de la Grange* play'd his *Amasis*; which is nothing else, than the Subject of *Merope*, under other Names. Gallantry is predominant also in this Piece; and contains more marvellous Incidents, than that of *la Chapelle*: but then it is conducted with more Art, more Genius, is more interesting, and wrote with more Fire and Force. And yet it had not at first any remarkable Success; & *habent sua Fata Libelli*. But it was, afterwards, brought on again with great Applause; and it is now one of those Pieces, whose Representation gives the Publick all the Pleasure imaginable.

Before and after *Amasis*, a great Number of Tragedies have made their Appearance, on much the same Subjects: in which a Mother is going to revenge the Death of her Son on the Son himself, and discovers him the very Instant she is going to kill him. We have likewise frequently seen, on our Stage, this moving, tho' for the most part, improbable, Situation; when a Person comes, arm'd with a Poignard, to kill an Enemy, whilst another enters the very Moment, and snatches away the Poignard. This Theatrical *Finesse*, at least for a time, gave a Run to *Corneille's Camma*.

But, of all the Pieces, I am speaking of, there is not one, which is not loaded with a little Episode of Love, or rather, Gallantry: because 'tis requisite, that, in all Cases, we should condescend to fall in with the predominant Taste.

Nor,

Nor, Sir, imagine, that this unfortunate Custom, of loading our Tragedies with an useless Episode of Gallantry, was owing to *Racine*, as is objected to him in *Italy*. 'Tis he, on the contrary, who did all that lay in his Power, to reform the Taste of the Nation, in this Particular. The Passion of Love never, in his Plays, makes an Episode: 'tis a Fundamental Point, in all his Pieces, and what forms the principal Business. 'Tis the most Theatrical of all the Passions, the most abounding with Sentiments, and the most productive of Variety. It ought to be either the Soul of Stage-performances, or to be entirely banish'd from it. If Love be not tragical, it is insipid: and, if it is tragical, it ought to reign singly. It is not made to be secondary. 'Tis *Rotrou*, 'tis the great *Corneille* himself, it must be own'd, who, in establishing our Theatre, have almost ever spoil'd it, by these arbitrary Amours, these Scenes of Gallantry; which are not real Passions, nor any ways worthy of the Stage. And if you ask, why so few Pieces of *Corneille* are play'd at this time of Day, don't look for a Reason elsewhere: 'tis, because in the Tragedy of *Otho*,

Otho compliments the Princess,
More like a Man of Wit, than sincere Lover.
He, Step by Step, pursues a Strength of Memory,
Easier to be admir'd, than probable.
Camilla seem'd to give sufficient Proofs,
She thought the same: She would have relish'd better
A Speech, less labour'd. Tell me then, since *Otho*
Has made an Offer of his fine Accomplishments
To fair *Camilla*, has he been more satisfied,
Or she more condescending?

'Tis because, in his *Pompey*, the useless *Cleopatra* says,
that *Cæsar* .

Tells her his Sighs, and, in a plaintive Strain,
In his victorious Camp, proclaims himself
Her Captive.

'Tis, because *Cæsar* demands of *Anthony*,
If he had seen this all-accomplish'd Queen.

When *Anthony* answers,

Yes, my Lord!
I've seen her, and she is incomparable.

'Tis, because in his *Sertorius*, *Sertorius* himself, old as he is, grows amorous at once both politically, and as a Man of Taste, and says :

I love besides :

Love does but ill become me at my Age.
Let me ev'n hide it from the beauteous Charmer ;
As yellow Wrinkles of a shrivell'd Forehead
Have no great Charms to captivate the Senses.

'Tis, because in his *OEdipus*, *Theseus* begins, by saying to *Dirce* :

What dreadful Havock here displays the Pestilence !
True Lovers' Absence is still more deplorable.

In fine, 'tis, because such a Love, as this, can never force Tears ; and, when Love is not moving, it is very insipid.

I say Nothing, to you here, Sir, but What all People of Knowledge, and true Taste, profess every Day in Conversation ; What you have several Times heard at my House ; in short, What is in every one's Thoughts, and What, nevertheless, no body has the Courage to commit to the Press. For you know, how Men are made: almost every one writes contrary to his own Sentiments, for Fear of giving Offence to establish'd Prepossessions.

As for me, who never could admit, that Literature should be dash'd with Politicks, I declare to you boldly the Truth, and profess, that I have a greater Respect for *Corneille*, and am better acquainted with the extraordinary Merit of this Father of the Stage, than Those, who launch out in his Praises, at the Hazard of his Faults.

There was a *Merope* exhibited on the London Stage in 1731. Who would imagine that a Love-Intreague should there still find Admission ? But since the Reign of *Charles II*, Love has engross'd the *English* Theatre ; and 'tis evident, there is no Nation in the World that has painted this Passion so ill.

Love ridiculously introduced, and handled as ridiculously, is a Fault the least monstrous in the *English Merope*. The young *Egistus*, released from his Imprisonment by a virtuous Damself, that was in Love with him, is brought before the Queen ; who offers him a Cup of Poison, shews him a Poignard, and tells him ; that, if he would not swal-

low the Poison, that Poignard should dispatch his Mistress. The young Man drinks, and is carried off dying. He comes on again, in the fifth Act, and tells *Merope* coldly, that he is her Son, and that he has kill'd the Tyrant. *Merope* asks him, how this Miracle was wrought? He replies, that a Friend of his Mistress, had put some Poppy-Juice in the Cup, instead of Poison: and that he was only asleep, when they imagined him dead: that he was apprized, on awaking, he was her Son, which determined him to kill the Tyrant on the Spot. And so the Tragedy ends.

It had, no doubt, but an indifferent Reception: but is it not very strange, that it should be acted at all? Is it not a Proof, that the *English* Stage is not yet purged? It looks, as if the same Cause, which deprives the *English* of a Genius for Painting, and Musick, robs them also of That for Tragedy. That Island, which has produced the greatest Philosophers, the Earth ever bore, is not equally fertile in regard of the Liberal Arts. And, if the *English* did not very carefully follow the Precepts, laid down by their Countrymen, *Addison*, and *Pope*, they would not nigh come up to other People, in point of Taste, and Literature.

But, as long as the Subject of *Merope* was so mangled in a Part of *Europe*, it has been treated a great while in *Italy* according to the Taste of the Ancients.

In the sixteenth Age, which will be famous in all Ages, the Count *de Torelli* brought on his *Merope* with Chorus's. 'Tis evident, that if *Mr de la Chapelle* carried to an Extremity all the Faults of the *French* Theatre, such as Romantic Airs, Needless Love, and Episodes; and if the *English* Author has push'd, to an Excess, Barbarity, Indecency, and Absurdity; the *Italian* Writer has vastly improved the Faults of the *Greek* Stage, which are a Void of Action, and Declamation. In short, Sir, you have kept clear of all these Rocks; you, who have given your Countrymen Models in more than one Kind of Literature. You, in your *Merope*, have produced an Example of a simple and interesting Tragedy.

I have been charm'd with it, ever since I read it. My Love for my Country has never render'd me blind to the Merit of Foreigners. On the contrary, the better Commonwealth's-Man I am, the more I seek to enrich my Country with Treasures, that are not her native Production.

The

The great Desire I had of translating your *Merope* redoubled, when I had the Honour of contracting an Acquaintance with you at *Paris*, in 1733. I perceived, that, in loving the Author, I had still a greater Inclination for the Work. But, when I was just in the Mind to set about it, I found 'twas absolutely impossible to make it pass on the *French Stage*. Our Delicacy is become excessive: we are, perhaps, *Sibarites*, plung'd in Luxury, who cannot bear this native, and rustic Air, these Details of Country Life, which you have given us, in Imitation of the *Greek Theatre*.

I was afraid, that young *Ægisthus* would not be suffer'd, with us, to make a Present of his Ring to the Person, who lays hold of him, and who seizes this Ring. I could not venture to make a Hero taken for a Thief; altho' the Circumstance, he was in, might authorize this Mistake.

Our Customs, which probably permit as many Things, as your's do not indulge, would bar us from representing the Tyrant of *Merope* (the Murderer of her Husband and her Sons) pretending to have, after fifteen Years, a Love for this Queen: nor could I even dare to put in the Mouth of *Merope* these Words to the Tyrant: *Why then did you not speak of Love before, when the Flower of Youth still set off this Visage?* These Passages are natural; but our Pit, sometimes so indulgent, and at other times so delicate, might think them too familiar; and imagine, they saw Coquetry, when, in Reality, there was nothing, but just and right Reason.

Nor would our Stage, in *France*, suffer, any more than it would what we have been speaking of, *Merope* to tie her Son, in the Scene, to a Pillar; and to run at him twice, with a Javelin and a Hatchet in her Hand; nor permit young *Ægisthus* to fly twice, in her Presence, and beg his Life of her Tyrant.

Our Customs would still be more unwilling to admit, that *Merope's* Confidante should persuade *Ægisthus* to fall asleep upon the Stage, to give Time to the Queen to come and assassinate him. All this may very well be in Nature; but you must pardon our Nation, which requires that Nature be ever exhibited with certain Strokes of Art: and these Strokes are very different at *Paris*, from what they are in *Italy*.

To give you a just Idea of the Differences, which the Genius of cultivated Nations makes, in regard of the same Arts, permit me, Sir, to extract some Passages, in your celebrated Work, which appear'd to me to be dictated by pure Nature.

He that seizes young *Ægistus*, and takes his Ring from him, says to him:

*Or dunque in tue paese i servi
Han di coteste gemme? Un bel paese
Fia questo tuo; nel nostro una tal gemma
Ad un dito real non sconverrebbe.*

I shall take the Liberty to translate this Passage into blank Verse, as you wrote it: because I am so press'd for Time, that I cannot bestow the Labour on it, which Rhime requires.

Wear Slaves then in your Country
Such costly Gemms? A charming Country, surely,
Is That of your's. Here, such a pretious Jewel
Might well adorn the Finger of a King.

The Tyrant's Confident says to him, speaking of the Queen, who refused to espouse, twenty Years after, the notorious Assassin of her Family:

La donna, comme sai, ricusa, e brama.

She, 'tis well known, rejects, yet longs. —

The Queen's Attendant answers the Tyrant, who presses her to dispose her Mistress to Marriage:

*Disfinito in vano
S'offre di febre. Assalto alquanti giorni
Donare è forza a rinfrancar suoi spiriti.*

Dissembling is in vain:

The Queen is all on Fire. Indulge some Time
To raise her-drooping Spirits.

In your fourth Act, old *Polidore* demands of one of *Merope's* Courtiers, who he is. I am *Eurises*, says he, the Son of *Nicander*. *Polidore* then, speaking of *Nicander*, expresses himself, as *Nestor* does in *Homer*.

*Egli era umano,
E liberal: quando appariva, tutti
Faceangli enor. go mi ricordo ancora*

*Di quanto ei festeggiò con bella pompa
 Le sue nozze con Silvia, ch'era figlia
 D' Olimpia & de Glicon, fratel d' Ipparco.
 Tu dunque sei quel fanciullin, che in corte
 Silvia condur solea quasi per pompa?
 Parmi l' altri hieri : o quanto siete pressì !
 Quanto voi vaffretate ! o giovinetti
 A farvi adulti, & à gridar tacendo
 Chi noi diam loco !*

He was humane,

And liberal. When he appear'd abroad,
 All paid him Honour. I remember still,
 With what Solemnity, and radiant Pomp,
 He was espous'd to *Silvia*, *Glicon's* Daughter,
 And fair *Olympia's*, Sister to *Hipparchus*.
 Are you the charming Infant then, whom *Silvia*
 Would oft convey to Court with such Parade?
 It seems but Yesterday.

And in another Place the same old Man, invited to go
 and see thee Ceremony of the Queen's Marriage, answers :

Oh curioso

*Putno i non son, passo stagione. Assai
 Veduti ho sacrificij ; io mi ricordo
 Di quello ancora, quando il Re Cresfonte
 Encomenciò a regnar. Quella fu pompa !
 Ora più non si fanno a questi tempi
 Di cotai sacrifici piu di cento
 Fur le bestie svenate. I Sacerdoti
 Risplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgesti
 Altro non si vedea che argento ed oro.*

I am no ways curious :

That Time is past with me. These Eyes have seen
 Solemnities enough. I still remember
 The crowded Festival, when King *Cresfontius*
 Began his radiant Reign. How pompous was it !
 These Days see no such costly Sacrifices.
 More than a hundred Victims bled before
 The sacred Altars. All the Priests around
 Stood glitt'ring ; and the dazzled Eye beheld
 Nothing but Silver, and pure Gold.

All these Strokes are native: every Thing is adapted to Those, you introduce on the Stage, and to the Manners, which you assign them. These natural Familiarities would have been, in my Opinion, well received in *Athens*: but *Paris*, and our Pit, require another Kind of Simplicity. We might even boast of having a more refined Taste, than had the *Athenians*: for, in short, I think, they only represented, ordinarily, Theatrical Pieces, in this first City of *Greece*, but on four solemn Festivals; and *Paris* exhibits more than one Shew every Day in the Year. There were counted in *Athens* but ten thousand Souls; and our Town of *Paris* contains almost eight hundred thousand Inhabitants: amongst whom, I believe, one may reckon thirty thousand Judges of Dramatic Performances.

You have had it in your Power, in your Tragedy, to adopt that elegant and simple Comparison of *Virgil*:

*Qualis populeâ mœrens Philomela sub umbrâ
Amisso queritur Fœtus.*

If I was to take such a Liberty, they would send me to Epic Poetry: such Difficulties have we with so hard a Master, as is the Public.

*Nescis heu! nescis nostræ fastidia Romæ:
Et pueri nasum Rhinocerontis habent.*

The *English* are accustomed to close almost every Act with a Comparison: but we require, in a Tragedy, the Heroe to speak, and not the Poet. And our Audiences think, that, in a grand Crisis of Affairs, in a Council, in a violent Passion, a pressing Danger, Princes and Ministers make no poetical Comparisons.

Farther, how could I introduce inferior Persons speaking frequently together? It serves, with you, to prepare the Scenes, that regard the principal Actors; being, as the Avenues of a fine Palace: but our Public, such is their Impatience, are for entering at once into the Palace. It is necessary, therefore, to condescend to the Taste of so difficult a Nation, that has, now a long time past, been regaled with Pieces, perfect in their Kind.

In the mean while, amongst so many Particulars, which our extreme Severity reproves, how many Beauties ought I to regret, which 'tis not in one's Power to adopt! How much

much ought simple Nature to please me, tho' of foreign Extraction! You see, Sir, I render an Account, in Part, of the Reasons, which have deprived me of the Pleasure of setting you for a Pattern, by admiring You.

I was obliged, very much against my Inclination, to write a new *Merope*: which I have done, in a different Manner; but I am far from flattering myself, that I have done it better. I look upon myself, in your regard, as a Traveller, to whom an Eastern King had made a Present of very rich Brocades. 'Tis reasonable, that this King should allow the Traveller the Privilege to have them made up after the Fashion, peculiar to his own Country.

My *Merope* was finish'd at the Beginning of the Year 1736, much like what it is at present. My Engagements, in respect of other Studies, hinder'd me from giving it to the Theatre. But, what deterr'd me most from taking such a Step, was, the Apprehension, I was under, of sending it abroad; after so many Pieces, happily wrote, had made their Appearance in the World, under different Names.

In a Word, I have run the Risque of my Tragedy, and our Nation has given a convincing Proof, that she did not disdain to see the same Subject treated, on a different Plan. 'Tis the Case of our Stage, what one sees every Day in a Gallery of Paintings, where several Pictures represent the same Matter. Connoisseurs please themselves in remarking the various Manner. Every one, agreeably to his Taste, pitches upon the Style of each respective Painter. 'Tis a Sort of Concurrence, that is made use of, to bring Arts, at once, to Perfection, and to enlighten the Public to a more eminent Degree.

If the French *Merope* has had the same Success, as the *Italian*, 'tis to you, Sir, that I owe the Obligation; and to that Simplicity, which I have ever been superstitiously fond of; which, in your Work, has served me for a Model. If I have taken a different Road, you, notwithstanding, have never fail'd to be my Guide.

I could have wish'd, it were in my Power, after the Example of the *Italians*, and the *English*, to employ my Talents at blank Verse; and I have more than once thought of this Passage of *Rucelai*:

*Tu sai pur che l'imagin' de la voce
Che risponde da i sassi. dove l' Echo Alberga.*

Sempre

*Sempre némica fu del notro regno
E fu invintrice delle prime rime.*

But, I perceived, and have said, a long time ago, that such an Attempt would never succeed in *France*; and that there would be more of Weakness in it, than any Probability of throwing off a Yoke, borne by the Authors of so many Works, which will last as long as the *French* Nation shall endure.

Our Poetry cannot take the Liberty, as your's does : and, perhaps, this is one Reason, why the *Italians*, for more than three Ages past, have got the Start of us in this so amiable and so difficult an Art.

I should be glad, Sir, to make you a Pattern in other Respects, as I have had the Happiness to imitate you in Tragedy.

I would particularly form myself on your Taste in the Science of History; not in that vague and barren Science of Facts and Dates, which contents itself to tell us, at what time a very worthless, or a very mischievous, Man went out of the World: altogether a Sort of Dictionary-Science, which clogs the Memory, without informing the Judgment.

I would have a History of the Human Mind, that should lead us into the Knowledge of Manners; trace, Fault by Fault, Prejudice by Prejudice, the Effects of Men's Passions; lay before us the Evils produced either by Ignorance, or an indirect Application of Parts; and that should, above all, follow the Thread of the Progress of Arts, thro' the terrible Broils of so many Potentates, and the Overthrow of so many Empires.

'Tis on this Score, that I value History : which I do the more, on Account of the Rank you hold amongst Those, who have given the World new Pleasures, and new Lights. Posterity will learn with Envy, that your Country has render'd you the most distinguish'd Honours; and that *Verona* has erected to you a Statue, with this Inscription : TO THE MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI, LIVING : an Inscription, as fine, in its Kind, as That we read at *Montpellier* : To *Lewis XIV.* after his Death.

Vouchsafe to add, Sir, to the Homages of your Fellow-Citizens, That of a Foreigner, who by the profoundest Respect is as much attach'd to you, as if he had been a Native of *Verona*.

MEROPE.



M E R O P E.

A

T R A G E D Y.

ACT the FIRST.

SCENE the FIRST.

M E R O P E, I S M E N I A.

I S M E N I A.



Anish, Great Queen, these Images of Horror!

And, calm of Soul, indulge the halcyon Days,

Sprung from the Lap of fierce, outrageous, Storms.

The Gods have giv'n us Victory and Peace.

Taste then their Bounty, as you've borne their Anger.

After a fifteen Year's intestine War,

Messina lays aside her shudd'ring Fears,

Lifts up her Head; and triumphs o'er her Ruins.

B

No

No longer will your Eyes survey these Chiefs
 Drawing the hostile Sword in hideous Tumult,
 To wrest the Sceptre from the Best of Kings :
 Disjoin'd by Int'rests, but in Crimes united,
 In Rapine strongly leagued, and bloody Slaughter.
 Our Chiefs, our Citizens, the Law's great Oracles,
 And Priests of the high Gods, are all assembled
 Under your Eyes, unbiass'd in their Choice,
 T'adjudge the Crown ; indisputably your's,
 If Merit, and exalted Virtue, gives it.
 You, You alone possess th' undoubted Right
 To rule us, Consort of the great *Cresfontius*,
 And Daughter of our Kings : you, whom firm Con-
 [stancy,
 And a long Train of unexampled Sorrows,
 Render still more august, still more endear'd :
 To whom all Hearts in secret are close link'd.

M E R O P E.

Hah ! is not *Narbas* come ? Where, where's my Son ?
 Will he more bless these Eyes ?

I S M E N I A.

There's room to hope it.
 Already have your Slaves, with rapid Pace,
 Took them, in Crowds, to *Elis* : to whose Walls
 Calm Peace on ev'ry side lays ope the Way.
 No doubt, you've plac'd this sacred Pledge, the Source
 Of infinite Alarms, in faithful Hands.

M E R O P E.

Ye Gods, O conscious of my Tears, O, will you
 E'er to my wretched Arms restore my Son ?
Ægistus, lives he ? Has your guardian Care
 Preserv'd this hapless Infant, now alas !
 My only Stock ! Far from his budding Years
 Remove the murth'rous Hand ! Behold, he's Your's,
 Your

Your Offspring, born of *Hercules'* pure Blood.
Will you abandon then this pretious Relique,
Born of so just a King, and God-descended ;
The Image of a Monarch, of a Husband,
Whose Ashes I adore ?

ISMENIA.

But must these Cares,
Tho' flowing from a just and tender Source,
Ah! must they supersede all other Int'rests ?

MEROPE.

Is This astonishing ? An't I a Mother ?

ISMENIA.

But shall a Mother's overweening Fondness
Taint the high Blood you spring from, and efface
The Glories of your princely Character ?
His Infancy was pretious to your Eyes,
Oft swoln with Tears : but then this Son, you now
Deplore, was ne'er familiar to your Sight.

MEROPE.

The Child I mourn was ever in my Heart
Confest to fairest View : the num'rous Dangers,
Surrounding him, have ever fed my Sorrows,
Encreasing still with Years. The golden Sun
Four times has measur'd now his annual Course,
Since one bare Word from *Narbas*, 'midst my Soli-
The dark Retirement of my hapless Days, [tude,
Planted fresh Woes in my distracted Soul.
Aegistus, wrote he in a Stile concise,
Deserves a better Fate ; worthy of you,
And worthy of the Gods, from whence he springs.
In spite of Ills, on Ills his Virtue ever
Surmounts them all : hope ev'ry Thing of him :
But tremble at the Name of *Polifont*.

B 2

ISMEN.

No longer will your Eyes survey these Chiefs
 Drawing the hostile Sword in hideous Tumult,
 To wrest the Sceptre from the Best of Kings :
 Disjoin'd by Int'rests, but in Crimes united,
 In Rapine strongly leagued, and bloody Slaughter.
 Our Chiefs, our Citizens, the Law's great Oracles,
 And Priests of the high Gods, are all assembled
 Under your Eyes, unbiass'd in their Choice,
 T'adjudge the Crown ; indisputably your's,
 If Merit, and exalted Virtue, gives it.
 You, You alone possess th' undoubted Right
 To rule us, Consort of the great *Cresfontius*,
 And Daughter of our Kings : you, whom firm Con-
 [stancy,
 And a long Train of unexampled Sorrows,
 Render still more august, still more endear'd :
 To whom all Hearts in secret are close link'd.

M E R O P E.

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 Will he more bless these Eyes ?

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 But tremble at the Name of *Polifont*.

B 2

ISMEN.

ISMENIA.

Prevent his Schemes : invest yourself with Empire,
Great as you are.

MEROPE.

The Empire is my Son's.
The Step-mother be curs'd, curs'd the hard Heart,
That Self-Idolater, which, in the highest,
Most elevated, State, without Remorse
Can taste the barb'rous Pleasure, and detain
A Crown from one's own Blood! What's Empire worth
Without my Son? Or what avails this Light,
This Breath I draw? I should have then renounc'd it,
When in these ghastly Seats my murther'd Lord
Bled a full Stream, by Men and Gods betray'd.
O Perfidy! O Guilt! O fatal Day!
O Death, still present to my piercing Grief!
The Sounds, the horrid lamentable Shrieks,
Still echo in my Ears : Methinks I hear
The Cries, Oh! save the King, his Spouse, and Son!
The bloody Walls are still before my Eyes,
And the beleagur'd Gates ; the smoking Roofs,
And Women crush'd to Atoms ; in dread Numbers
Slaves urging their swift Flight, dire Tumults, Terrors,
Arms, Torches, grisly Death on ev'ry Side!
There, swimming in his Gore, and smear'd with Dust,
His dying Eyes still turn'd tow'rds me, *Cresfontius*,
Expiring, lock'd me in his circling Arms.
Two of my wretched Sons, the first fair Fruit
Of that dear Union, in their tender Years,
There helpless lay, a bloody Sacrifice,
On the pale Bosom of their butcher'd Sire ;
Scarce able to up-lift their spotless Hands!
Alas! they ask'd my Help 'gainst their Assassins.
Ægistus 'scap'd alone : some Heav'nly Pow'r
Protected him. Great God, to whose kind Influence
We

We stand indebted for his wond'rous Safety,
 Be watchful o'er him still, and send him to me!
 Restor'd by *Narbas* to my longing Eyes,
 Quit he his Exile, and (his rightful Claim)
 Hold his august Forefathers' awful Sceptre!
 Full thrice five Years I've borne his painful Absence,
 And my hard Chains. Now let him, in my Stead,
 Ascend the Throne: 'twill balance all my Sorrows.

SCENE II.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

Ah! *Narbas*, does my Son? —

EURICLES.

Confus'd you see me:
 Your Pains, and anxious Cares, are all superfluous.
 Madam! they've travers'd wide *Olimpia's* Plains,
 Ev'n to the Banks of *Peneus*, and the Walls
 Of high *Salmoneus*; but no News of *Narbas*.
 Not the least Footstep can the searching Eye
 Trace out, or Tidings greet the eager Ear.

MEROPE.

Hah! *Narbas* is no more: all's lost indeed.

ISMENIA.

You realize the shadowy Ills you dread.
 Chance, on the Rumour of this happy Peace,
Narbas may bring the Prince to crown our Wishes.

EURICLES.

Perhaps his Tendernefs, discreet and cautious,
 Prompts him to viel the Purport of his Journey,
 And likewise his Return. He o'er *Aegistus*
 Extends his watchful Guard; and dreads th' Assassins,
 Who

Who, Butcher-like, cut off the King, your Consort.
 Art must be us'd t'elude their hellish Plots.
 But I'll insure, the best I can, his Passage.
 I carry, on these Roads of bloody Slaughter,
 Eyes ever open, and an Arm approv'd.

M E R O P E.

In thy Fidelity I place my Confidence.

E U R I C L E S.

Ah! What can my sad Vigilance do for you?
 The Throne is on the Point of being fill'd.
 In vain my feeble Voice, amidst the Many,
 Displays th'undoubted sacred Rights of Blood.
 Injustice triumphs; and the giddy Rabble,
 In vile Contempt of Laws, bow down to *Polifont*.

M E R O P E.

Could Fate then sink us to that low Degree?
 And must my Son return to be a Slave,
 Ev'n in his own Domains; and see a Subject
 Rais'd to the Rank of his Imperial Ancestors?
 The Blood of *Jove* to serve a lawless Tyrant?
 No Friend have I then left me. O my Subjects,
 Insensible of Royal Wrongs! Must then
 My Consort's Name be lost thro' your Indifference,
 His Bounties, and his Glory, all forgot?

E U R I C L E S.

The Glory of the King lives still endear'd
 To ev'ry Breast: all Hearts deplore *Cresfontius*.
 He and your Fate an inexhausted Spring
 Afford of Tears to ev'ry sorrowing Eye.
 But Force must bear the Sway, and *Polifont*
 Spread Terrors ev'ry where.

M E R O P E.

So by my People,
 Ever oppress'd, must I give way to Tumult;
 And Justice fall a Sacrifice to Faction.

Vile

Vile Int'rest, that great Arbiter of Fate,
 Subjects the helpless World to wicked Power.
 Let's go; and in these timid Breasts rekindle
 The old Attachment to the Blood of *Hercules* :
 Flatter their Hopes, excite their dormant Love.
 Speak, and proclaim their Master's blest Return.

EURICLES.

I've spoke too much already : sore alarm'd,
 The Traitor fears your Son, and dreads your Tears.
 The curst Ambition, that usurps his Soul,
 Is restless, hot, and Foe to all that's sacred:
 If he the Robbers from *Amphrysus* drove,
 And *Pilos*, and preserv'd *Messina's* Tow'rs ;
 He thought t'have made a Conquest for himself :
 Acting alone to that vile End, determin'd
 T'enslave Mankind. The Regal Crown he aims at.
 And, not to have his curs'd Ambition balk'd,
 There's no Barrier, his Force will not throw down ;
 No Laws, he wo'nt corrupt, or Blood, he'll spill not.
 Perhaps, you've now no Cause to fear the Ruffians,
 Who in your Consort's Blood imbrued their Hands.

MEROPE.

Alas! Where-e'er I bear my restless Feet,
 Fate opens to my View a dread Abyfs.
 Danger and Guilt, I see, surround my Steps,
 Lo! *Polifont*, on whose account Attempts —

EURICLES.

Dissemble, Madam, for he bends this Way.

SCENE III.

MEROPE, POLIFONT.

POLIFONT.

Madam! at length Affairs demand, that I
 Display the inmost Chambers of my Soul.

This

This Arm, that serv'd you, opens to the Throne
 A Passage ; and the Grandees of the State,
 All ready to instal me in a Kingdom,
 Render me worthy, as yourself, of Empire.
 Of all the jarring and divided Parties,
 That laid *Messina* waste ; shed so much Blood ;
 And sow'd the hateful Seeds of such rude Discord ;
 At present none subsist, but your's and mine :
 Where 'tis but just we should afford each other
 Mutual Support. The common Enemy,
 Love of our Country, Duty, Int'rest, Reason,
 All Motives tie us. 'Tis a Maxim founded
 On universal Usage, that a Warriour,
 Th' Avenger of your Lord's foul Wrongs, aspiring
 To Empire, may, without Indignity,
 Aspire to hold you in the Bands of Wedlock.
 I'm not insensible, what little Share
 This uncouth rigid Front can boast of Charms,
 Grown grey beneath the Helmet ; and well know,
 Your softer Beauties, in their rosie Bloom,
 Must shudder at the Winter of my Years.
 Reasons of State are Strangers, ne'ertheless,
 To these Caprices : and the noble Scars
 Of this rude warlike Forehead can't be hid,
 But by a Diadem. A Sceptre I
 Claim, and your Graces, to reward my Toils.
 Trust, trust not to a rash, o'erbearing, Pride !
 Rais'd high in glitt'ring Pomp, you shine confess'd
 The Daughter, and the Mother, of a King.
 The lab'ring State, ne'er'less, demands a Master.
 And 'tis incumbent on you to consider,
 The Way to guard your Rights, is now to share 'em.

M E R O P E.

Heav'n, that has crush'd me with the heavy Weight
 Of foul Disgrace, and loaded me with Misery,
 Has not prepar'd me for this Height of Boldness.

Thou

Thou Vassal of my Lord, how dare you thus
Offer to sully his immortal Memory,
By such Expoufals? Hah! d'y'think, that I
Would quit my Son, the only Good that's left me,
And join with you in such a sad Partition?
Trust to your Hands his Mother, and his State,
And round a Soldier's Temples with a Diadem?

POLIFONT.

A Soldier, such as I, has just Pretensions
To Empire, as he knows how to defend it.
The first King was a Soldier, blest by Fate.
Who serves his Country well, needs no high Ancestors.
I've no Blood left to fill my batter'd Veins:
This in a Series of rude Wars I've shed;
Spilt for my Country: this Blood flow'd for you.
And, spite of your Refusal, I'm persuaded,
The Kings, I've vanquish'd, boast one jot no better.
In short, I offer to your haughty Soul
Half of the Throne, to which my Party calls me.

MEROPE.

A Party! Thou Barbarian, in Contempt
Of Laws! Then is there any other Party,
Than what adopts the Rights of Majesty?
Is This the Faith, the pure and sacred Faith,
Sworn to my Lord, and Me? The Faith you owe
His injur'd *Manes*, his abandon'd Widow,
And heple's Son; and all the Gods, from whom
He issues, and of whom he holds the Empire?

POLIFONT.

'Tis doubtful, if your Son breathes vital Air.
But should he, from among the peaceful Dead,
Visit these Earthly Mansions, and demand
Once more his Throne in th' open Face of Heaven;
Be not deceiv'd: *Messina* claims a Sov'reign,
Improv'd by Years, one worthy of a Sceptre:

C

A

A King, who knows how to defend her Turrets.
 And I dare urge, th' Avenger of a Throne
 Has th' only Right to mount it. Alas! *Ægistus*,
 Young as he is, and raw, without Experience,
 Would but in vain display his lofty Birth,
 Without some Merit, from renown'd Atchievements.
 This Throne was purchas'd at another Price.
 The Right of Governing is not transmitted,
 Like an Inheritance, by Nature's Laws.
 But 'tis the Fruit of Toils, Blood shed in War;
 The Price of Courage, and I trust, my Due.
 Call to your Mind the Day, that boist'rous Day,
 When the foul Band of *Pilos* and *Amphrysus*
 Alarm'd your Soul: remember how your Lord,
 And hapless Offspring, fell inglorious Victims,
 Just in your Presence, to th' Assassins' Cruelty.
 Think, how I stop'd the Progress of their Fury;
 Gave your Foes Chace, and snatch'd the State from
 [Ruin.

In short, my Arm, victorious, freed these Walls;
 And sore aveng'd the Husband, you deplore.
 These are my Rights, my Rank, and these my Titles:
 Rights sprung from Valour, as the Gods bear Witness.
 Let the young Prince return! He'll learn of me
 Lessons of Glory, and the Art of Royalty.
 Let him be Judge, if this rough Front of mine
 Becomes a Crown. *Alcides'* Blood sounds grand:
 But raises no astonishing Ideas.
 Lo! I'm in quest of nobler, grander, Honours.
 I think to emulate the God himself,
 From whom he is descended. In a Word,
 'Tis mine to guard the Mother, and to shine
 A pattern to the Son, and be a Father.

M E R O P E.

Cease at this Time t'affect such gen'rous Cares:
 Nor more insult my lamentable Issue.

If

(II)

If you dare trace the Steps *Alcides* trod,
Rob not, accurs'd, the Blood of *Hercules*.
This God, whom you'd unjustly thus succeed,
Who freed so many States, was no foul Ravisher.
His Justice make your Pattern, as his Valour,
Defend your King, protect his Innocence :
Restore my Son, my exil'd Son restore !
And win his Mother by the Force of Virtue.*
Call home your Master to the Walls you've sav'd :
Then might I grow indulgent to your Wishes.
I, I could stoop ; but can't become Accomplice
In dark Misdeeds, and be the Price of Villany.

SCENE IV.
POLIFONT, EROX.

EROX.

My Lord, do you observe her Soul relent?
And must the Bent of her capricious Will
Bar you from Reigning? You are not to learn
How, by fam'd Deeds, to pave the Way to Empire.
Will you then wait her Hand t' instal you in it?

POLIFONT.

Between this Throne and me I see a Precipice:
This I must over-leap, or all my Fortune
Must there be sunk in Ruins. *Merope*
Expects *Ægistus*: and as Things are circumstanc'd,
Should he once more return, the head-strong People
Might be inclin'd to him. In vain, his Sire
And his two Brothers sacrific'd, have I
Unbarr'd the Passage to this bloody 'Throne.
In vain within this Palace, where Sedition
Fill'd ev'ry Place with Horror and Confusion,
Have I thus long beneath a happy Veil

Hid my deep Plots, and thrown them into Shade:
 In vain th' Avenger of the Blood of Kings,
 Their foul Oppressor, in the People's Thoughts,
 I've idly reign'd : my Fate will in an Instant
 Be now decided. If there be remaining
 A Remnant of the great *Alcides'* Race ;
 And, so deplor'd by ev'ry streaming Eye,
 This Son be brought to Light ; the anxious Labours
 Of fifteen restless Years become abortive.
 Trust me, this Prejudice of Blood and Birth
 Once more will seize their Hearts, and in a Moment
 Prompt them to his Defence. The proud Remem-
 Of his great Father, and a hundred Kings, [brance
 His Ancestors, and this pretended Honour
 Of springing from the Lineage of our Gods,
 The Cries and Phaints of a despairing Mother,
 Must instantly throw down my tott'ring Power:
Ægistus is the Foe I should have vanquish'd :
 O'er him have triumph'd. Bar to all my Grandeur,
 Fix'd I was to dispatch him in his Cradle.
 But *Narbas'* ever-faithful, watchful, Care
 Snatch'd his young Charge, in Safety, from my Eyes,
 And from the Hands, could serve me. Since that,
 [*Narbas*,
 Far from these Borders, has defied my Search,
 Eluded my Efforts. I intercepted
 The Messages he sent : cut off all Commerce
 'Twixt *Merope* and him. However, Fate
 I'm well acquainted with : 'tis possible
 That She may alter : from a Night of Silence
 Oft springs a Secret ; and the indignant Gods,
 Abus'd their Patience, on our Heads show'r down
 Sure Vengeance, tho' it falls by slow Degrees.

E R O X.

Dismiss these Fears, and to your happy Destiny
 Reassign your Soul, Lo ! Prudence is the Deity,
 That

That watches o'er the Purport of your Heart.
 Your Orders are obey'd : your Guards already
 Possess the Bounds of *Elis* and *Messina*.
 Should *Narbas* e'er return, and to their Eyes
 Bring back *Ægistus*, both are sunk in Ruin.

POLIFONT.

But can you answer well for their blind Zeal?

ERON.

You've ever rul'd them with a faithful Hand.
 Nor is there One amongst them knows the Blood,
 That ought to flow : nor ev'n the Monarch's Name,
 Whom they're to sacrifice. *Narbas* to them
 Is painted as a Traytor, a vile Vagabond,
 A Criminal, that wants a Sanctuary.
 The other, as a Slave and Murtherer,
 Doom'd by the Rigour of the Laws to die.

POLIFONTE.

Alas ! again this Guilt ! 'tis very necessary ;
 But I, destroy'd the Son, shall want the Mother ;
 Want Nuptials, so conducive to my Grandeur ;
 That may prevent the foul Usurper's Name,
 And fix the Wishes of this faithless People.
 My Portion be, the Love they have for her.
 I read the very Bottom of their Hearts :
 With Pains they may be mine ; for warm'd by Hope,
 Or chill'd thro' Fears, their Int'rest binds them to me :
 This of itself secures them. Thou, whose Fate
 Depends on this my elevated Station,
 Support my Projects by thy friendly Cares ;
 And, *Eron*, go, unite discordant Spirits.
 Veil'd from the Publick, buy the Miser's Suffrage ;
 Assure the Courtezan of Half my Favours ;
 If any one should ponder, fire his Soul :
 Promise, conjure, bribe, threaten, use all Arts.
 In vain have I, undaunted, to a Throne

Cut

Cut my Way thro' thus far: 'tis small to conquer,
 Unless one has the Talent of Seducing,
 And flatt'ring this wild *Hydra* of the People;
 Training them to the Curb: in short, of pushing
 The Art, till I'm establish'd in their Love.

ACT II.

SCENE the FIRST,

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

What! Reigns there then an universal Silence?
 Can none ascertain my *Ægistus'* Destiny?
 I understand too well what This forebodes,
 From *Elis'* Frontiers is there then no News?

EURICLES.

No, not a Tittle. All we could discover,
 Was a young Stranger, whose ensanguin'd Hand
 Look'd horrible, distain'd with recent Murther.
 Chain'd by my Order, they have drag'd him hither.

MEROPE.

A Murtherer! Unknown! What has he done?
 Whose Blood was spilt? I'm quite congeal'd with Fear.

EURICLES.

The sad Effect of Love, your Soul is seiz'd with,
 Renders the least Event a mortal Stab.
 All serves to rend the fond maternal Heart,
 And makes the Voice of Nature speak within You.
 But sure, the common Story of this Murtherer
 Ought

Ought by no means t'alarm your frightened Spirits :
 Crimes ever on the Confines will be perpetrated,
 And Robbers range for Spoil. These Civil Wars
 Produce this horrid Fruit. Alas ! disarm'd
 Mourns awful Justice ; and our Plains, and Towns,
 Too long neglected, o'er and o'er demand
 Of the great Gods the Blood of Citizens,
 That strow'd the Ground, slain by each other's Hand.
 Discard the Terrors, that afflict your Soul.

M E R O P E.

Who is this Stranger ? Tell me, I implore.

E U R I C L E S.

One of those Mortals, to all ill abandon'd,
 Nourish'd in Baseness, and condemn'd to Labours ;
 A nameless Wretch, if one may trust Appearance.

M E R O P E.

However, whoso'er this Unknown be,
 Let him approach my Presence. Oft it happens,
 That thro' ignoble Means, and slender Evidence,
 Great Truths are brought to Light. Chance, I indulge
 Too much the Trouble, that thus sinks me down.
 But oh ! compassionate this female Weakness !
 My Heart has all to fear, nor ought to be
 A Minute off it's Guard. Then let him come,
 That I may ask some interesting Questions.

E U R I C L E S.

Your Orders are obey'd. *Ismenia*, Go :
 Let them conduct him hither, and the Queen
 Attend he instantly !

M E R O P E.

I see, I'm taking
 An inconfid'rate Care. Despair quite blinds me,
 And hurries me too far. Whether 'tis reasonable,
 You

You best can judge. Accumulated Misery
Is my sad Portion. They dethrone the Son,
And heap Abuses on the Mother's Head.
Taking Advantage of my wretched State,
Polifont rises to that Pitch of Boldness;
So far forgets his Duty, as to make me
An Offer of his Hand.

EURICLES.

You aggrandize
The Ills, that press you. Well I know, these Nuptials
Must hurt your Glory; but they are extorted:
And angry Fate obliges you to suffer
This fell Disgrace. A cruel Part it is
To act; but then, perhaps, the only one,
Able to keep the Throne for it's right Master.
This is the Sentiment of all the Generals,
Of all the Army: and 'tis thought —

MEROPE.

No, No!

My Son can't suffer This. Exile itself,
To which condemn'd his Infancy has languish'd,
Can't gall his Soul so, as would these loose Nuptials.

EURICLES.

He might condemn them, if he could in peace
Trust to the Rights of Blood. But, if his Soul
Has, thro' Distresses, learnt a proper Lesson;
He'll regulate his Conduct by his Interests.
Should he consult his melancholy Friends,
And the supreme of Laws, Necessity;
He'll find his wretched Mother could not give
A greater, dearer, Instance of her Love.

MEROPE.

Ah! What d'y' say?

EURICLES.

Unpalatable Truths;
Extorted by my Zeal, and your Calamities.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

What, *Euricles*, must Int'rest then surmount
Th' invincible Aversion I bear *Polifont*;
Whom you have painted in such fable Colours?

EURICLES.

Dang'rous I've painted him; I know his Fury:
Girded with Pow'r, and irresistible.
He's without Heirs, and, sure, you love *Ægistus*.

MEROPE.

Ah! 'tis this Love, deep-rooted in my Heart,
That renders *Polifont* more odious still.
Why are you ever on th' ungrateful Topick,
Talking of Nuptials, and of hated Empire?
Talk of my Son; and say, if he survives.
Cruel! apprise me.

EURICLES.

Lo! the Stranger, whom
Your sad Surmizes made you burn to question.

SCENE II.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ÆGISTUS
Chain'd, ISMENIA, *Guards*.

ÆGISTUS.

At the farther part of the Stage to Ismenia.

Is This that Queen, so wretched and august,
She, whose bright Glory, and tremendous Ills,
Ev'n reach'd my Ears, 'midst distant Wilds and Desarts?

ISMENIA.

Assur'd, the very same.

ÆGISTUS.

God of the Universe!
Thou God, who form'd those Graces, guard thy Image!
How worthy Thee is Virtue on a Throne!

D

MEROPE.

M E R O P E.

Is This the Murtherer? Can Cruelty
Reside in such a soft and sweet Exterior?
Approach, whatever Pressures load thy Soul,
And dissipate thy Fears! Say, with what Blood
Are thy Hands tainted?

Æ G Y S T U S.

Pardon me, ô Queen!
Distresses and profound Respect congeal
My wretched Voice, thus trembling at your Aspect.
My Soul, astonish'd, in her Presence melts.

[To Euricles.]

M E R O P E.

Speak! Say, whose Life thy Arm has sacrific'd.

Æ G Y S T U S.

A bold intrepid Youth's, whom Fate's Decrees,
And his own Rein-less Rage, led on to Death.

M E R O P E.

A Youth's! my Blood ev'n freezes in my Veins.
Ah! — Did'st Thou know him?

Æ G I S T U S.

No, *Messina's* Plains,
Her Walls, her Citizens, all's new to me.

M E R O P E.

What! Did this unknown Youth approach you,
(arm'd?)
That what you did, you did in your Defence?

Æ G I S T U S.

Heav'n be my Witness, conscious of my Innocence!
On the far distant Confines of *Pamifus*,
Within a sacred Temple, where the Shrine
Of one of your great Predecessors, *Hercules*,
Shines honour'd with distinguish'd Veneration,

For

For you I boldly offer'd up my Prayers
 To this great God, th' Avenger of dire Crimes.
 Of Presents destitute, and pompous Victims,
 Poor from my Birth, I put up simple Vows;
 Tendred a Heart unsullied and submissive,
 All that a Wretch could do. The God, methought,
 Touch'd at the Homage I, obsequious, paid,
 Inspir'd my Soul with more than mortal Courage.
 Two Ruffians, arm'd, rush'd on me unawares;
 One in his Bloom, the Other worn with Age.
 Under what Influence come you here, they cry'd:
 Or what's the Purport of the Vows, pour'd forth
 Thus ardently for great *Alcides'* Race?
 Both One and th' Other, at these impious Words,
 Lifted his Poignard: in this sad Conjunction
 Heav'n stretch'd its pow'rful Arm to my Defence.
 This Hand chastiz'd the Fury of the Younger:
 Transfix'd, he fell, and paid his forfeit Life.
 Assassin as he was, the Other basely
 Fled from my Sword. For my Part, I avow,
 Uncertain of my Fate, and ignorant
 Whose purple Gore had thus distain'd the Earth,
 Dreading to be adjudg'd to cruel Tortures,
 And Death, for an involuntary Murder,
 I drag'd the bloody Carcase to the Tide.
 Then fled: but soon your Guards obstruct my Flight.
 At the high Name of *Merope*, I instant
 Resign my Arms.

EURICLES.

Madam, whence flow these Tears?

MEROPE.

Shall I then tell Thee? All the while, alas!
 He artless dwelt on his disastrous Tale,
 My Heart within me melted at his Voice.
Gresfontius! Heav'ns! 'tis so. — I'm all Confusion.

M E R O P E.

Is This the Murtherer? Can Cruelty
Reside in such a soft and sweet Exterior?
Approach, whatever Pressures load thy Soul,
And dissipate thy Fears! Say, with what Blood
Are thy Hands tainted?

Æ G Y S T U S.

Pardon me, ô Queen!
Distresses and profound Respect congeal
My wretched Voice, thus trembling at your Aspect.
My Soul, astonish'd, in her Presence melts.

[To Euricles:

M E R O P E.

Speak! Say, whose Life thy Arm has sacrific'd.

Æ G Y S T U S.

A bold intrepid Youth's, whom Fate's Decrees,
And his own Rein-less Rage, led on to Death.

M E R O P E.

A Youth's! my Blood ev'n freezes in my Veins.
Ah! — Did'st Thou know him?

Æ G I S T U S.

No, *Messina's* Plains,
Her Walls, her Citizens, all's new to me.

M E R O P E.

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 My Heart within me melted at his Voice.
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Yes, I can trace some Likeness of *Cresfontius*.
 O cruel Sport of Fortune! that an Image,
 So false in Fact, should bear such sweet Resemblance!
 Dreadful Reflection, what vain Dream deludes me?

EURICLES.

Discard then all Surmize, suggesting Guilt.
 He's no Barbarian, trust me, no Impostor.

MEROPE.

The Gods, indeed, have on his Looks stamp'd
 [Candour.
 Stay! (*to Ægistus*) In what Place did Heav'n allot
 [your Birth?

ÆGISTUS.

In *Elis*,

MEROPE.

What! in *Elis*! Ah! perhaps —
Elis — you say — perhaps you may know *Narbas*.
 At least *Ægistus*' Name has reach'd your Ears.
 What was your Rank, Condition, who your Sire?

ÆGISTUS.

My Father was depress'd with Years and Misery;
 And *Policlete* his Name. *Ægistus*, *Narbas*,
 Whom you ask after, I know nothing of,

MEROPE.

Ye Gods! You sport you with a wretched Mortal!
 Just now a Drop of sweet-reviving Hope
 Cheer'd my sad Breast. I saw a Glimpse of Day.
 But my afflicted Eyes are now once more [neis.—
 Sunk in deep Sorrow, and o'erwhelm'd with Dark.
 And what Rank held your Parents, pray, in *Greece*?

ÆGISTUS.

If Virtue can ennoble, Those, to Whom
 I stand indebted for the Light that cheers me,
Policlete,

Policlete, Sirris, are by no means Mortals,
 Worthy of your Contempt. Their Fate abas'd them:
 But their sage Constancy still drew Respect;
 And made their Wants an honourable Indigence.
 Beneath his rustic Hut my virtuous Father
 Did Good, observ'd the Laws, and only fear'd
 Th' immortal Gods.

M E R O P E.

The more he speaks, the more
 He charms me with his Tale. How came you then
 To leave him, and oppress his Soul with Sorrow?
 No doubt, he's in an Agony to lose you.

Æ G I S T U S.

A vain Desire of Glory urg'd my Spirits
 On a fallacious Scent. *Messina's* Troubles
 Rung often in my Ears, and the Distresses,
 By the great Gods inflicted on the Queen.
 But, above all, her elevated Virtues,
 Worthy of better Destiny, alarm'd me.
 My Soul took Fire, as these disastrous Tidings
 Grew more confirm'd. Disdaining in my Heart
 Loose *Elis'* Softness, I resolv'd t' inure
 My Youth to Arms; to serve beneath your Banners;
 And make an Offer of my Strength in War.
 These were the only Motives urg'd my Steps.
 By this false Instinct, this false Thirst of Glory,
 My Courage was misled. My Parents, shrivell'd
 Under the Wrinkles of decrepit Age,
 Iv'e robb'd of Succour in my youthful Years.
 'Tis my first Fault, but saddens oft my Hours.
 Hence am I chain'd: inexorable Heaven
 Has cruelly involv'd me in the Snare,
 And heap'd on my devoted Head foul Guilt.

M E R O P E.

No: 'tis not he. That fair, ingenuous, Mind
 Excludes all Doubt; Falshood is more disguis'd.

Extend

Extend we to his Youth a princely Hand,
 Full of Beneficence. 'Tis some poor Object,
 The Gods bequeath me. 'Tis enough, he bears
 The Human Form, and that he is distress'd.
 My Son may labour under greater Hardships.
 He calls *Ægistus* to my fond Remembrance,
 Of equal Years with him : like him, perhaps, too,
 Roaming from Place to Place, without Resource,
 Abandon'd, and unknown, mark'd with Contempt,
 Entail'd on Poverty. The Soul's debas'd
 By Ignominy, and our Courage flags.
 What a dire Portion for the Blood of Gods !
 At least, if ———

SCENE III.

MEROPE, ÆGISTUS, EURICLES,
 ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

— Madam, hear you these sad Cries ?
 Are you appriz'd ———

MEROPE.

What Din alarms your Spirits ?

ISMENIA.

You'll learn by *Polifont* : the fickle Populace
 To his Ambition prostitute their Suffrages.
 He's King ; invested with th' Imperial Purple.

ÆGISTUS.

I thought the Gods had *Merope* advanc'd
 To the just Rank of her great Ancestors.
 Ye Gods ! the more exalted is our Station,
 The more we are to feel the Strokes of Fate.
 A Wanderer, abandon'd, as I am,
 Less I've to combat with. There's not a Mortal
 Without his Mis'ries, *Ægistus is led off.*
EURICLES

EURICLES to Merope.

I've already said it :
 Too haughtily did you refuse his Offer,
 Too much despis'd his Credit with the People.

MEROPE.

Th' Abyſs, we're plung'd in, opens to my View,
 With all its Horrors.— I thought, I knew the Gods;
 Thought, I knew Men: but I, alas! know Neither;
 Denied the Juſtice, I in vain expected.

EURICLES.

Let me, however, in this boiſt'rous Seafon,
 Summon thoſe Few of our faſt Friends about you;
 Who, if they can't divert th' impending Storm,
 May ſave at leaſt the Wreck; and ſhelter you
 From any new Attacks, that may be made
 By dang'rous Rebels, and a thankleſs People.

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

The State's not tainted with Ingratitude :
 No! You're eſtabliſh'd in your People's Love.
 Nor have they yet the Honour of the Diadem
 Permitted to be torn from off your Brow.
 They're ſenſible, that *Polifont*, in off'ring
 To you his Hand, would rob you of high Empire.

MEROPE.

They dare beſtow me on a boiſt'rous Tyrant,
 That braves me to my Face. My Son's betray'd;
 His Mother made a Slave.

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

The loyal People
Would place you on your fam'd Forefathers' Throne.
Follow their Voice, the Language of the Gods.

MEROPE.

Inhuman, you would have base *Merope*
Purchase vain Honour at the Price of Infamy.

SCENE V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA,
EROX, POLIFONT's *Guards*.

EURICLES.

Oh! I return all trembling to your Presence:
Prepare your Heart for terrible Disasters,
And summon all your Pow'rs to your Assistance.

MEROPE.

I've no Pow'rs left: unprecedented Ills
Have quite worn out my Courage; but no Matter.
Speak!

EURICLES.

'Tis all o'er; and Fate — I can't go on.

MEROPE.

Hah! What! my Son?

EURICLES.

He's dead! It is too true.
This horrid News has spread dire Consternation
Among your Friends, and frozen all their Zeal.

MEROPE.

My Son is dead!

ISMENIA.

Ye Gods!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Th' unworthy Ruffians
Strow'd all the Roads with impious Snares of Death.
The Crime's accomplish'd! Villany compleat!

MEROPE.

This Day, that I abhor, this genial Sun,
Gives Light for me! and *Merope* still lives!
He is no more! What Hands have torn his Flesh?
What Monster shed this Remnant of my Blood?

EURICLES.

Alas! this Stranger, this accurst Impostor:
Whose persecuted Virtues we admir'd.
For whom such Pity rose within your Breast,
His Guardian!

MEROPE.

Oh! this Monster is th' Assassin.

EURICLES.

There is no Room to doubt it. We've detected
This Moment two of his Accomplices,
And loaded 'em with Irons; who, in Disguise,
Search'd still for *Narbas*, 'scap'd their bloody Strokes.
He, who laid impious Hands on poor *Ægistus*,
Stripp'd him of the most pretious, dearest, Spoils:

Armour is brought on the Stage.

The Armour, *Narbas* from these Seats convey'd.
The Traitor threw away the sacred Pledges,
For Fear these bloody Signals should betray him.

MEROPE.

What is't you say? my Hands, these trembling
With it invested poor *Cresfontius*' Limbs, [Hands,
When, from my Arms, he first went out to Battle.
O fav'rite Spoils, in what Hands are you lodg'd!

E

What?

What? Did th' audacious, monstrous, Varlet ravish
This sacred Armour?

EURICLES.

'Tis the same *Ægistus*

Here us'd to wear.

MEROPE.

And tainted with his Blood:
I saw it with these Eyes: a dreadful Spectacle!
And the old Ruffian in *Alcides'* Temple?

EURICLES.

'Twas *Narbas*: 'twas his miserable Guide.
So *Polifont* avows.

MEROPE.

Tremendous Truth!

Alas! the fierce Assassin's bloody Arm,
In order to conceal his Guilt and Perjury,
Gave to my bleeding Son the Waves for Sepulture.
I see it throughly. Oh! What horrid Destiny!
Will you sound this Assassin to the Bottom?

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, ÆGISTUS, ISMENIA,
EROX.

EROX.

Madam, by me, permit my valiant Master,
'Too much disdain'd by you, too little known
Perhaps, in these abhorr'd, distracted, Moments,
To offer you his Succour. He's no Stranger
To sad *Ægistus'* Fate. The Part he takes
In the Misfortune of the Queen —

MEROPE.

He takes,
Indeed, a Part; but, *Erox*, without Pain.

He's

He's furnish'd with the Means; and Fate hath plac'd [him

On my *Cresfontius'* Throne, dethron'd my Son.

EROX.

He offers you this Throne. Consent to share
 With him this Blood-distain'd Inheritance,
 That waited for the Son, who's now no more:
 And, in your flowing Griefs to let him bend,
 Ev'n to your very Knees, a Brow, incircled
 With a fair Crown, which makes him worthy of you.
 But then 'tis necessary, you deliver
 Into my Hands the hardy Criminal.
 The Right to punish him's a venerable
 Prerogative; the Province 'tis of Kings.
 The Sword of Justice, that august Support
 Of Royalty, to him alone's committed.
 Hence 'tis the Purpose of his upright Heart,
 To guard your Rights, and those of all his People.
 The Blood of fell Assassins is the Sacrifice,
 That must be offer'd on th' ensanguin'd Altar
 Of These your Nuptials.

MEROPE.

No, the mortal Blow
 My Hand shall give. If *Polifont* be King,
 I beg his Pow'r will leave to my Despair
 The Care of my own Vengeance. Let him reign;
 Let him possess my Chattels, and my Honours.
 I claim no Glory, but t'avenge my Blood.
 This is the Purchase of my Hand. Go! Bid him
 Prepare for its Reception. Deep I'll plunge it
 In the foul Bosom of this vile Barbarian,
 This Pest of Human Race, forthwith to bear it,
 All reeking, to the Altars of our Gods.

EROX.

The King, rest still assur'd, will ever be
 Propitious to your Wishes. Ev'ry Pain,

E 2

And

And galling Anguish, that afflicts your Soul,
Must deeply wound his sympathizing Heart.

S C E N E VII.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

No! No! Believe me not. These impious Nuptials,
These Nuptials, I thus dread, shall ne'er be celebrated.
My Hand I'll bury in the Murtherer's Breast;
And, Him dispatch'd, I'll next dispatch myself.

EURICLES.

Madam, by all the Gods!

MEROPE.

The Gods too hard
Have bore upon me. Shall I seek their Altars,
The Object of their Wrath, who let my Son
Fall a dire Victim, to demand a Husband?
To graft a foreign Sceptre on the Sceptre
Of my pure Ancestors? And fun'ral Torches
Blend with the festal Links of white-rob'd *Hymen*?
That I should live, should lift my wretched Eyes
To yon exasperated Heav'n, for ever
Lost to my Son! should wait for frightful Age,
Amidst ten thousand Complaints, and my sad Hours
Make sadder, by a hateful Servitude
Under the worst of Masters! When All's lost,
And Hope no more remains, Life then becomes
An Ignominy, and we ought to die.

A C T III.

SCENE THE FIRST.

NARRAS.

O Grief! O Woes! O burthensom Old Age!
No longer that imprudent fiery Temper

Could

Could I restrain. That strong heroic Ardour,
 And the fierce Transports of exalted Courage,
 Disdaining to be thus obscure beneath
 My Tutelage, have borne him far away.
 He's lost : inroll'd, perhaps, among the Dead.
 How shall I face the Mother of my Master ?
 Ye Gods ! What grand, accumulated, Evils
 Here bend me to the Earth ! Without *Ægistus*
 Am I return'd, and *Polifont's* the King !
 This blest Artificer of Frauds and Crimes,
 This Savage Cut-throat, girt around with Victims,
 Who hunted us from Climate to sad Climate,
 Scatter'd in ev'ry Place the Seeds of Death,
 For ever at our Heels. He reigns, Triumphant,
 Establish'd on the Throne, that he profanes !
 Allow'd t'enjoy it in the Peace of Heaven,
 Which must condemn him ! Gods ! Let my return
 Be cover'd from his penetrating Eyes !
 God's ! Guard *Ægistus* from tyrannic Violence !
 Conduct me to his Mother, at her Feet
 To breathe my last. 'This sad Abode, I think,
 I recollect. Twas here, the Best of Kings
 Receiv'd his Death : And, on this very Spot,
 I sav'd his Son, all bloody, in my Arms.
 After a Banishment of fifteen Years,
 I hapless come alas ! a-fresh t'o'er-flow
 With Tears his Mother's Cheek. Whom can I trust ?
 I go in Quest of some transcendent Friend,
 Whose faithful Hand may lead me to her Sight.
 But no one stirs within my aged View.
 Hard by a Tomb I ken a Crowd dismay'd ;
 Hear plaintive Cries. Alas ! within this Palace
 A persecuting God for ever dwells.

S C E N E

S C E N E II.

NARBAS, ISMENIA, *following the Queen to the remote Part of the Stage, where is erected Cresfontius's Tomb.*

ISMENIA.

What Stranger's this, whose inconfid'rate Boldness
Disturbs the Queen's Repose, and penetrates
Her close Retreats? Is't any hideous Agent,
Sent by our Tyrants, with a prying Eye
T'explore the Sorrows of the fore-afflicted?

NARBAS.

O, whosoe'er thou art, excuse my Boldness.
'Tis a poor Wretch, that comes to ask a Favour.
He could serve *Merope*, and wants to speak with her.

ISMENIA.

Ah! when can you intrude on her Retirement?
Regard the Griefs of a distracted Mother.
Unhappy Stranger, don't offend her Sight.
Depart.

NARBAS.

Alas! By the vindictive Gods,
Indulge this Condescension to my Years,
And to my Sorrows. I am not unknown
In sad *Messina*. Rest assur'd, if Love,
Or Service, binds you to the Queen, my Heart,
Link'd to her Fate, like your's, has sympathiz'd
With ev'ry one of her long Train of Sorrows.
What Tomb is't, rises in these solemn Seats,
Source of those Tears, I saw this Moment flow?

ISMENIA.

A Monarch's Tomb, abandon'd by the Gods;
A Hero's, Husband's, and disastrous Father's;
That of *Cresfontius*.

NARBAS.

N A R B A S, *Going towards the Tomb.*

——— Oh! my royal Master!
Oh! th' Ashes, I adore!

I S M E N I A.

Cresfontius' Relict

Has still more Causes for intemp'rate Grief.

N A R B A S.

What Strokes of Fate have heap'd Misfortunes on
Unhear'd of yet? [her,

I S M E N I A.

Strokes, most accurs'd by Nature.
Her Son is murth' red.

N A R B A S.

What? Her Son *Ægistus*?
Ye gracious Gods! th' unfortunate *Ægistus*?

I S M E N I A.

His Story here is known to ev'ry Mortal.

N A R B A S.

Will he be then no more?

I S M E N I A.

A barb'rous Ruffian
Just at *Messina's* Gates rip'd up his Bosom.

N A R B A S.

O dire Despair! O Death! which my sad Fears
Had long foretold. He is assassinated!
Is *Merope* appriz'd what Fate o'er-took him?
Are you not mis-inform'd?

I S M E N I A.

Undoubted Signs
Evince the monstrous Deed. There's no Necessity
For long Harangue: his Death is past Dispute.

N A R B A S.

NARBAS:

But to what Purpose are these Cares employ'd ?

ISMENIA.

Resign'd to fell Despair, poor *Merope*
 Is just expiring : all her Courage fails her.
 She only liv'd for this sad Son of her's.
 So all the Knots, that tied her Life together,
 Are now dissolv'd. Yet, e'er she sinks in Death,
 She'll be aveng'd. The Blood of the Assassin,
 By her vindictive Hand, must stain the Earth.
 At dear *Cresfontius'* Tomb she goes to sacrifice.
 The King, who grants Permission for these Obsequies,
 Seeking t' indulge her in her piercing Sorrows,
 A Servant has injoin'd to lead the Criminal,
 At the same Instant, to the solemn Altar ;
 There to be immolated to the Blood,
 And the dear *Manes*, of her murth' red Son.
 Mean while, in this Excess of flowing Sorrow,
 She wills, that all the World from this sad Place
 Be distant far.

NARBAS, *going*.

Alas ! If this be so ;
 'Tis needless to unveil my secret Purpose.
 Lo ! at the Foot of this dread awful Tomb,
 I've nought to do, but lay me down, and die.

S C E N E III.

ISMENIA, *alone*.

This old Man is, no Doubt, a faithful Citizen.
 He weeps, and bears the Marks of unfeign'd Zeal.
 He weeps : while all the rest, the Tyrant's Slaves,
 Turn far from us their unlamenting Eyes.
 How come our Tears to int'rest him so much ?

He

He seem'd to agonize, and for the murder'd
Ægistus shew'd a true paternal Heart.
 Let us run to him — But, what cruel Object!

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES,
ÆGISTUS chain'd, Guards, Priests.

MEROPE, *standing by the Tomb.*

Before my Eyes place this Guilt-loaded Victim.
 And let us, if we can, invent dire Torments,
 Proportion'd to his Crime. But no dire Torments
 Can be invented, equal to my Sorrow.

ÆGISTUS.

Ah! I pay dear for that small Glimpse of Favour.
 Aid me, great Gods, propitious to the Innocent!

EURICLES.

Before he suffers, let him name the Villains,
 Associate in his Guilt.

MEROPE, *advancing.*

'Tis fit, he should.
 Who urg'd thee, Monster, to this Pitch of Wicked-
 [ness?
 To so much Rage? What have I e'er done to thee?

ÆGISTUS.

The Gods, th' Avengers of foul Perjury,
 Can witness, that my Tongue knows no Imposture.
 I, at your Feet, spoke Nothing but real Truth:
 Which soft'ned then your irritated Heart;
 And made you stretch out your protecting Hand.
 Who could so soon efface those just Ideas?
 Or what Blood's this, my harmless Error spilt?
 What int'rests you afresh thus in it's Favour?

F

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

What int'rests me, Barbarian!

ÆGISTUS.

On her Visage

I spy alas! Death's lamentable Image.

How it affects me! I could shed my Blood [ness,
 A hundred Times, to raise her from the Wretched-
 Wherein I see she's plung'd, quite overwhelm'd.

MEROPE.

Hah! What a Master of Dissimulation!
 He, cruel, robs me of my Life, then seems
 To moan my sad Distresses: vile Impostor!

She sinks into Ismenia's Arms.

EURICLES.

Madam, avenge yourself! Avenge, at once,
 The Laws, and Nature, and our Monarch's Blood.

ÆGISTUS.

Is this the Justice of these Monarchs' Court?
 They flatter, sooth me, then resolve my Punishment.
 Oh! by what Fate was I drag'd from the Desert?
 Unfortunate old Man! what mighty Anguish
 Awaits your Soul! O my disastrous Mother!
 Whose dear, dear Voice foretold all I now suffer.

MEROPE.

Barbarian! You've a Mother! I a Mother
 Had still been, but for Thee, and thy dire-Fury.
 You've kill'd my Son.

ÆGISTUS.

If such be my Misfortune;
 If 'twas your Son, I'm highly criminal.
 My Heart is innocent, my Hand not so.
 What a sad Wretch I am. Heav'n knows my Soul:
 I could have giv'n my Life for you, and him.

MEROPE.

M E R O P E.

What! Traytor! when you robb'd him of this Ar-
[mour —

Æ G I S T U S.

'Tis mine:

M E R O P E.

How's That? What say you?

Æ G I S T U S.

Here I swear:

By you, by this dear Son, by your high Ancestors,
I from my Father had this precious Gift.

M E R O P E.

From Whom? Thy Father? And in *Elis*, say You?
What Trouble am I plung'd in! What his Name?
Speak! Answer me!

Æ G I S T U S.

His Name is *Policlete*.

This Truth before drop'd from my artless Tongue.

M E R O P E.

You rend my Heart. Oh! what unworthy Pity
Suspends my Rage? It is too much, too much!
Second the *Vengeance*, that now leads me on.
Drag to this Tomb, this Monster, this Perfidious!
Ye *Manes* of my Son, my bloody Arms —

N A R B A S, *appearing hastily*.

What are you going to do? O Gods!

M E R O P E.

Who calls me?

N A R B A S.

Hold! Hold! — Alas! He's lost, should I once
[mention

His Mother's Name, and he be known.

F 2

M E R O P E.

M E R O P E.

Die, Traytor !

N A R B A S.

Hold !

ÆGISTUS, *lifting up his Eyes towards Narbas*,
O my Father !

M E R O P E.

What ? His Father ?

ÆGISTUS, *to Narbas*.

Gods ?

What is't I see ? O ! Whither tend your Steps ?
Come you to be a Witness of my Death ?

N A R B A S.

Madam, prevent th' Accomplishment of Guilt,
Lend, *Euricles*, your Ear : discard the Victim.
Let me just speak one Word.

Euricles leads off Ægistus.

O Heav'ns !

M E R O P E, *advancing*.

You set

My Blood o'fshudd'ring in my Veins. I went
T'avenge my Son.

N A R B A S, *falling on his Knees*.

You went to sacrifice him.

Ægistus —

M E R O P E, *dropping the Poignard*.

Hah ! *Ægistus* ?

N A R B A S.

Hapless Queen !

He, whom your Hand was destin'd to cut off,
Is your *Ægistus*.

M E R O P E.

Should he live ?

N A R B A S.

N A R A A S.

'Tis he;

It is your Son.

Merope, *falling into Ismenia's Arms.*

I'm dying!

I S M E N I A.

Pow'rful Gods!

N A R B A S *to Ismenia.*

Call back her posting Spirits. This just Excess
Of flowing Joy and Tenderneſs alas!
This ſuddain Trouble, theſe oppreſſive Thoughts,
Haſte to conſume her Days, inur'd to Sorrow.

M E R O P E, *coming to herſelf.*

Ah! *Narbas*, is it you? No cheating Dream?
Is't you? Hah! What, my Son? O! lead him on;
Let him advance!

N A R B A S.

O ſtill be on your Guard:
And ſmother this juſt Tenderneſs. Reſerv'd,
Conceal for ever this important Secret. [*to Ismenia,*
Ægiſtus' Safety, and the Queen's, depend on't.

M E R O P E.

Ah! what freſh Dangers poiſon all my Joy?
What God forbids, that I ſee dear *Ægiſtus*?
Is he reſtor'd, but for a greater Trouble?

N A R B A S.

Unknown to You, you went to dip your Hand
In his dear Blood. If his Arrival's blown;
By your Adoption, you inſure his Ruin.
Spite of the Voice of Blood, diſſemble, feign:
Guilt's on the Throne: you're perſecuted; tremble!

S C E N E

SCENE V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, NARBAS,
ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

Madam, the King—has order'd 'em to seize ——

MEROPE.

Whom?

EURICLES.

This young Stranger, destin'd to just Punishment.

MEROPE.

Hah! What, this Stranger! He's my Son, my
They're going, *Narbass*, in his guiltless Side [Blood.
To plunge the bloody Knife. Come, let's away.

NARBAS.

Stay!

MEROPE.

'Tis my Son, they drag along. For What?
What execrable, sudden, Enterprize?
Why rob me of *Ægistus*?

EURICLES.

Polifont,
It seems, e'er he avenge your matchless Wrongs,
Specious Pretences forms to Question him.

MEROPE.

What? Question him? Knows he, who is his Mother?

EURICLES.

None yet surmise this dreadful Mystery.

MEROPE.

Let's haste to *Polifont*: implore his Mercy.

NARBAS.

Implore the Gods; there center all your Fear!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Should this Son's Rights give Umbrage to the King,
Your Nuptials are at least his Safety's Pledge.
Prepar'd to be united to your Graces,
By an eternal Band, your Son, of Course,
Will, at the sacred Shrines, become his own.
And, tho' he should be jealous of the Prince,
Yet your Espousals must command Regard
For young *Ægistus*.

N A R B A S.

Must you wed him? What Thunder-clap? O Heav'ns!

M E R O P E.

'Tis dying piece-meal in such cruel Trouble.
I go.

N A R B A S.

**You shall not. O thou wretched Mother!
You must not celebrate these hideous Nuptials.**

EURICLES.

Narbas, she's forc'd to give to him her Hand.
He can avenge *Cresfontius*.

NARBAS.

He's a Murtherer.

M E R O P E.

What, He? The Traitor!

NARBAS.

Yes, himself. His Hands,
His bloody Hands, dispatch'd *Ægistus*' Father ;
Dispatch'd his Brothers. I beheld the Villain
At the dire Work, and saw th' inhuman Strokes :
Saw him all cover'd with your Husband's Blood.

M E R O P E.

O Gods!

NARABS.

NARBAS.

I've seen this Monster circled round
 With Victims; seen him heaping 'gainst your Royalty
 Accumulated Guilt. He o'er his Rage
 Threw a thick Veil, by Force of Villany :
 Open'd himself this Palace to the Foe :
 Transported hither the fierce Flame of War ;
 And, amongst Slaughter, Darts, Fire, Tumult,
 [Plunder,
 With your Son's Blood besmear'd, this Vanquisher
 Of Robbers, the Assassin of his Prince,
 Affected to be thought his dread Avenger.
 With Foes, with dying Groans, was you surrounded :
 Whilst, pressing thro' a thick, distracted, Crowd,
 With much ado, I in my languid Arms
 Bore off your Son. His Days, all innocent,
 Have still drawn Pity from the gracious Gods :
 Sixteen long Years have I conducted him
 From Clime to Clime. The better to conceal
 My Charge, I took the Name of *Policlete*.
 And, now I've snatch'd him from your fatal Stroke,
 Curs'd *Polifont*'s his Master, and your Spouse !

MEROPE.

Ah ! my Blood freezes at this hideous Tale.

EURICLES.

They come : 'tis *Polifont*.

MEROPE.

Oh ! Go ! nor let his Rage have one small Glimpse
 Of *Narbas*. Gods ! is it possible ?
 [To *Narbas*.

NARBAS.

If your Son alas ! is dear
 To your maternal Heart, Madam, dissemble
 With this Assassin.

EURICLES.

EURICLES:

Let this Secret sink
 Ev'n to the Bottom of my Soul. One Word,
 One only Whisper, may be fatal to him.

MEROPE, to Euricles.

Ah! haste; and let your ever-watchful Eyes
 Guard the dear, pretious, Pledge.

EURICLES.

You need not doubt it;

MEROPE.

Alas! I place my Hopes in thy sage Conduct.
 It is my Son, thy King. Ye Gods! the Monster
 Advances, in big Pomp.

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, POLIFONT, EROX,
 ISMENIA, *Attendants.*

POLIFONT.

The Throne Attends you,
 And the crown'd Altars are prepar'd around.
 The *Hymenean* Rights, that wait to join us,
 Will also join our Int'rests. As a King,
 And as a Husband, Duty now enjoins me
 T'avenge the Murther, and defend your Honour.
 The two Accomplices, whom my Commands
 Loaded with Chains, and hurried to a Dungeon,
 Are going to atone your Son's high Blood,
 By shedding of their own. But, spite of all
 My anxious Cares, your dilatory Vengeance
 Has seconded but ill my watchful Zeal.
 I to your Arms resign'd the rude Assassin:
 To whom 'twas just, you said, for you to give
 The speeding Blow.

G

MEROPE.

M E R O P E.

Oh! that th' immortal Gods
Would give my Arm the Pow'r t'avenge foul Crimes!

P O L I F O N T.

'Tis the Devoir of Kings, the Noble Care,
That warms my Breast.

M E R O P E.

Your Breast?

P O L I F O N T.

How comes it then,
That you've deser'd this signal Act of Justice?
Alas! is your maternal Love relax'd?

M E R O P E.

May Vengeance, adequate to savage Deeds,
Descend on all his Foes, devoted Heads.
But if, my Lord, this Murth'rer has Accomplices!—
If I could, by his Means, detect the Arm,
The barb'rous Arm, that slew my royal Consort —
And Those, where impious Rage dispatch'd the Sire,
And will the Son pursue, and wretched Mother,
With an eternal, fix'd, devoted, Vengeance —
If one could —

P O L I F O N T.

This is what I want to know.
And the vile Wretch already's in my Power.

M E R O P E, *Starting.*

What, in your Hands?

P O L I F O N T.

Yes: and I hope to penetrate.
This cover'd Guilt, and dark, mysterious, Villany,
When once I come to put my Questions to him.

M E R O P E.

Ah! barb'rous Man! he ought to be alone
At my Disposál. Oh! restore him to me!

You

You know, you pledg'd your Word for what I ask.
My Blood! my Son! Oh! what sad Fate attends you!

[*Aside.*

My Lord! O pity me!

[*To Polifont.*

POLIFONT.

What suddain Gust
Transports you thus? He dies.

MEROPE.

He?

POLIFONT.

One would think,
His Death should comfort you.

MEROPE.

I, at this Instant,
Could gladly see him, gladly could discourse him.

POLIFONT.

This motley Medley, this unhear'd of Mixture
Of Horror and of Tenderneſs, theſe Transports,
Which hurry on your flutt'ring Soul, Half-Speeches,
This Change of Countenance, might well alarm,
Conceiv'd I any Umbrage, *Polifont.*

But may I in pure Terms unfold my Sentiments?
Some new Diſpleaſure ſeems t'have ſeiz'd your Soul.
What ſays the Stranger worn with Toils and Years?
Why flies he ſtill my Eyes? How juſtly might
Suſpicions fill my Breaſt! Who is he?

MEROPE.

Ah,

My Lord! ſcarce ſettled on the Throne, do Fears
Already, and dire Jealouſies, ſurround you?

POLIFONT.

Divide this Throne then; and, ſecur'd my Happineſs,
Surmiſes will be baniſh'd from my Heart.
The Altar long has waited *Merope*
And *Polifont.*

M E R O P E.

Oh ! that th' immortal Gods
Would give my Arm the Pow'r t'avenge foul Crimes!

P O L I F O N T.

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If one could —

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And the vile Wretch already's in my Power.

M E R O P E, *Starting*.

What, in your Hands ?

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This cover'd Guilt, and dark, mysterious, Villany,
When once I come to put my Questions to him.

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At my Disposal. Oh ! restore him to me !

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Could gladly see him, gladly could discourse him.

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Of Horror and of Tendernefs, these Transports,
Which hurry on your flutt'ring Soul, Half-Speeches,
This Change of Countenance, might well alarm,
Conceiv'd I any Umbrage, *Polifont.*

But may I in pure Terms unfold my Sentiments?
Some new Displeasure seems t'have seiz'd your Soul.
What says the Stranger worn with Toils and Years?
Why flies he still my Eyes? How justly might
Suspicious fill my Breast! Who is he?

MEROPE.

Ah,

My Lord! scarce settled on the Throne, do Fears
Already, and dire Jealousies, surround you?

POLIFONT.

Divide this Throne then; and, secur'd my Happiness,
Surmises will be banish'd from my Heart.
The Altar long has waited *Merope*
And *Polifont.*

MEROPE, *weeping*.

The partial Gods have given you
Cresfontius' Throne. Nought now remain'd to render
His Wife's fell Horrors, and her Woes compleat,
But this accurs'd, abominable, Crime.

ISMENIA.

Ah! Madam!

MEROPE.

Pardon me my Lord! you see
A lost, distracted, Mother: One, the Gods
Have strip'd of All, quite cover'd with Confusion,
Surrender (pardon me) my Son's Assassin.

POLIFONT.

Since it is so, his Blood is on the Point
Of flowing in full Stream beneath my Hand.
Come, Madam!

MEROPE.

Gods! under this pressing Horror,
Succour a Mother, and veil all her Weakness.

ACT IV.

SCENE the FIRST, POLIFONT, EROX.

POLIFONT.

Such were the Transports of her ruffled Soul,
I thought at length, th' Assassin of her Husband
Had been detected; that her Eyes had pierc'd
The dark Abyfs, where, in Impunity,
My Guilt was buried. Recoiling back with Horror,
Her Heart was still reluctant to my Vows.
But 'tis not that, it is her Hand, I want.
Let her indulge her impotent Disdain,

Just

Just as she will. 'Tis time I link her fast to
My Wheel of Fortune. As for you, d'y'come
To see this Murtherer? What think you of him?

ER O X.

Nothing disturbs his Breast: Artless of Tongue,
But firm, and all inflexible, he seems.
The Fear of Death makes not the least Impression
On his resolv'd, impenetrable, Soul.
I've sound'd him, and ne'er, my Lord, before
Found so much Courage in a State so low.
I own, that, in my private Thoughts, he charms me,

P O L I F O N T.

What is he, in a Word?

ER O X.

He's what I dread
To let you know: not one of these Assassins,
Manag'd in secret to serve your Designs.

P O L I F O N T.

Can you assert This with such Confidence?
Their Tutor is no more. My just Suspicion
Has taken Care t'efface the shameful Traces
Of this State-Secret, in his dang'rous Blood.
But this young Stranger saddens all my Hours,
And fills my Soul with Torment. Are you sure,
Ægistus has defeated all my Schemes?
Can I believe that Fate, still hitherto
Subservient to my Will, could drop me Here!

ER O X.

The Tears of *Merope*, in sad Despair,
Pining away her hated Life, establish
A strong Assurance of your Happiness:
And all I see confirm it in Effect.
Chance has produc'd a Train of great Events,
With stronger Energy, than all our Cares.

P O L I -

POLIFONT.

Chance often out-strips Prudence. But I have
 Too many Enemies, am too experienc'd,
 To leave to her the Issue of my Fate.
 Whoe'er this Stranger be, 'tis necessary
 His Death be hasten'd: That will fix my Throne
 Sufficiently; 'tis fit it should be so.
 Under my Laws eternally oblig'd,
 The People would believe their Prince cut off
 By Death, and That aveng'd. But answer me:
 What rash old Man is This, denied my Sight
 With so much Mystery? As *Merope*
 Was going to let out th' Assassins Blood;
 He stop'd her Hand, you say. What are his Views?

EROX.

My Lord! This old Man, burthen'd with his Misery,
 Is the young Stranger's Sire. He came t'implore
 The Pardon of his Son.

POLIFONT.

His Pardon, say you?

Bring him to me. Believe me, he betrays me.
 Why else is he conceal'd? This mighty Secret
 Alarms my anxious Breast: I must extort it.
 But most the Murth'rer raises my Suspicions.
 Urg'd by what strange Caprice, what potent Reasons,
 Did late the Queen, who, in such pressing Terms,
 Solicited before his Punishment,
 Unfinish'd leave so just a Sacrifice?
 Soft Pity seem'd to mitigate her Rage,
 And Beams of Joy gleam'd ev'n amidst her Sorrows.

EROX.

What signifies her Pity, Joy, or Vengeance?

POLIFONT.

All signify, and I mistrust them all.
 She's coming! Now conduct this Stranger hither.

SCENE

S C E N E II.

POLIFONT, EROX, ÆGISTUS,
EURICLES, MEROPE, ISMENIA,
Guards.

M E R O P E.

Discharge your Oaths, indulge me in my Vengeance,
And to my Hands alone resign the Victim.

P O L I F O N T.

He's here before you! How your Int'rest fires me!
Avenge you! Bathe you in the Ruffian's Blood!
I, thro' his Carnage, lead you to the Altar.

P O L I F O N T.

Ye heav'nly Pow'rs!

Æ G I S T U S to Polifont.

You then devote my Blood
To the Queen's Nuptials! My poor Life's alas!
Of slender Worth, and I shall, calm, resign it:
Yet am I wretched, innocent, a Stranger:
If the immortal Gods have made you-King,
'Tis to protect me. I have justly kill'd
An unjust Adversary. *Merope,*
She wills my Death, excus'd, she is my Mother.
I shall ev'n bless the Strokes, prepar'd to fall
Upon me from her Hand. Nor have I aught
Here to accuse, but such a monst'rous Tyrant,
Such a vile, complicated, Pest, as Thou art.

P O L I F O N T.

Thou Wretch! Dar'st thou, in thy ouragious Info-
[lence? —

M E R O P E.

My Lord, excuse th' Imprudence of his Youth.
Bred far from Courts, and nurs'd 'midst savage Woods,
He's yet a Stranger to that just Decorum,
That's due to Kings.

P O L I -

POLIFONT.

What is it wounds my Ears?
What Talk is This? How is my Soul surpriz'd!
What? Do you plead for him?

MEROPE.

Who, I, my Lord?

POLIFONT.

Yes, You. At length will you not extricate
Your Mind from these wild Wand'rings? This the
That slew your Son? [Ruffian,

MEROPE.

My Son the wretched Remnant
Of such a Race of Kings, my Son, involv'd
In a sad Snare, beneath the boist'rous Arm
Of a Barbarian —

ISMENIA.

Heav'ns! What are you doing!

POLIFONT.

Hah! do you now survey him without Passion?
D'y' tremble at his Sight, and do your Eyes
Melt at his Woes? And would you hide the Tears,
They're pregnant with?

MEROPE.

I do not strive to hide 'em:
They're evident enough, and from a Cause
Arise most just; and oh! this Cause you know.

POLIFONT.

Then to dry up their Source, 'tis time, that he
Expire, This Instant, Soldiers, sacrifice him!

MEROPE, *advancing*.

Cruel! What dare you say?

ÆGISTUS.

In soft Compassion
For my Distresses, all your Senses fail you.

POLIFONT.

Dispatch him.

Eu.

MEROPE.

He is —

POLIFONT.

Strike!

MEROPE, *throwing herself between Ægistus, and the Soldiers.*

Thou fierce Barbarian!

He is my Son.

ÆGISTUS.

By all the Gods! What, I

Your Son?

MEROPE, *embracing him.*

Yes, you. And Heav'n, which I attest,
That Heav'n, which form'd you in so sad a Womb,
And which too late alas! has op'd my Eyes,
Sends you back to me, to destroy us both.

ÆGISTUS.

What Miracle, ye Gods, past Comprehension!

POLIFONT.

Such an Imposture, purely to surprize me!
His Mother, You, who so much urg'd his Death?

ÆGISTUS.

Ah! Should I die her Son, I bless my Fate.

MEROPE.

I am his Mother, and my Fondness for him
Has quite alas! betray'd me. You detain,
In your base Hands, the Secret of my Life:
Detain the Son of Gods, in Chains before you,
Cresfontius' Heir, thy Master, and thy King.
You, if you please, may call me vile Impostor.
Tyrants are ever deaf to Nature's Voice.
Inur'd to Blood, your Heart can ne'er relent.
Yes, 'tis my Son, I say, escap'd from Slaughter.

H

POLIFONT.

POLIFONT.

What have you here to plead, and on what Grounds?

ÆGYSTUS.

Go! I'm persuaded, I'm her Son. Her Tears,
My Sentiments, my Heart inflam'd with Glory,
This Arm of mine, which had, if not disarm'd,
Chastiz'd your Insolence, all, all evince it.

POLIFONT.

Thy Rage, before-hand, shall be singly punish'd :
It is too much for mortal Mind to bear.

MEROPE, *kneeling*.

Begin the Tragedy by killing me.
Pity the gushing Tears, that drown my Eyes,
What is it you'd have more? Here at your Feet
Sighs *Merope*, sad *Merope* embraces 'em, [Mother,
And dreads your Wrath. Judge, whether I'm his
By this Effort, abhorrent to soft Nature :
Judge of my Torments. My detested Error,
This Morn, was going to transfix the Heart
Of my dear Son. Bent lowly on my Knees,
I my involuntary Crime deplore.
How cruel You! who promis'd to extend
To his young Years a true paternal Care,
Who ought to guard from Harm his hapless Days.
See! He's before your Eyes: and will you stab him?
By a dread Crime alas! his Father died.
O Save the Son! I can forget the rest.
Save the high Blood of Gods, and of your Sov'reign's.
He's quite defenseless, and at your Disposal.
Live he, and that's enough. In him alone
Happy, amidst my Mis'ries, I no more
Shall mourn his Brothers, or my murder'd Husband.
You see his Parent on the bended Knee,
Your King in doleful Chains.

ÆGYSTUS.

ÆGISTUS.

Rise! O Queen, rise!

And condescend to let me prove, *Cresfontius*
 Was my great Sire; in ceasing to debase
 His Widow, and my Mother. I know little
 Of my Prerogative, or native Rights.
 But Heav'n has in my Mould mix'd too much Pride,
 Giv'n me a Heart too haughty, to be humbled
 By a vile Tyrant. From my Birth I've struggled
 With Lowliness of Fortune; and my Eyes
 With Pomp are not yet dazzled. I'm descended,
 I'm conscious, from the Blood of Kings. I'm conscious,
 I am your Son. My Predecessor, *Hercules*,
 Just as I've done, began his great Career.
 His Eyes scarce open, he encounter'd Evils:
 Crown'd by the Gods with Immortality,
 For having been, like my poor self, victorious
 O'er adverse Fate. If I can boast his Blood,
 I'll likewise shew his Fortitude of Soul.
 Worthy of you to die, is all I wish.
 Give o'er your Supplications; cease to weep:
 Cease to bely the Blood of Demi-Gods?
 Which flows, notorious, in my high-born Veins:

POLIFONT to Merope.

Now must I ope my Breast without Reserve.
 I share the Griefs, which bow you to the Earth:
 His Courage charms me, I esteem his Virtues;
 And, if he is not, think his Merits claim
 To be descended from the Blood of Kings.
 But then a Truth of such Importance, asks
 To be establish'd on undoubted Evidence.
 I'll guard him: he's already to my Care
 Consign'd: and, if he really should derive
 His Birth from you, adopt him for my own.

ÆGISTUS.

Hah! you adopt me?

H 2

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

O my beating Heart!

POLIFONT.

His Fate determine : Nothing can avert it,
 But your Espousals. Vengeance, in this point,
 Once master'd your high Soul. Shall Love do less,
 When Life's at Stake?

MEROPE.

Oh ! Barb'rous!

POLIFONT.

'Tis all over.

Your Heart has hitherto appear'd too tender
 T' expose this Object of such Floods of Tears,
 Thro' Obstinacy, to my just Resentment.

MEROPE.

However, let his Fate, my Lord, depend
 On his own Conduct. O vouchsafe this Favour!

POLIFONT.

He either is your Son, or he's a Traytor.
 I must be link'd with you, if you'll preserve him ;
 Or shall revenge the high Indignity
 Of a Refusal both on you, and him.
 Pardon, or Punishment, is in your Hands.
 You are, in one bare Word, his genuine Mother,
 Or an Accomplice, to impose on me.
 Make which you will your Choice: but know, when
 We're hence departed, I shall never more [once
 Give Ear, but in the Presence of the Gods.
 Let him be guarded, Soldiers, is brought after me.
 I now attend you : would you have him live?

[To Merope,

Fix, in one Word, my fluctuating Soul.
 Confirm his Birth, by giving me your Hand.
 His Life, or Death, depends upon your Answer:
 And he's my Son, or my devoted Victim.
 Adieu!

MEROPE.

M E R O P E.

Oh! do not drag him from my Sight.
Restore him to my Love, and vain Despair.

P O L I F O N T.

You'll find him at the Temple.

ÆGISTUS, *the Soldiers leading him.*

Piteous Queen,

So great, and so endear'd! O, whom I scarce
Dare yet call Mother! Let no Act start forth,
Unworthy you, or me. And, if I am
A Branch of your high Stem, and King-descended;
I in a Manner, suiting Majesty,
Know how to die.

S C E N E III.

M E R O P E, *alone.*

O cruel, as thou art!

You hurry him away. In vain my Voice
Implores thy Mercy: and I've only seen him,
To lose him now a-fresh. Why did my Vows,
Thou God, O too much harra's'd with my Prayers,
Pierce thy indulgent Ear? Why was this Object
Of all my Wishes to my Arms restor'd?
You snatch'd him from a foreign Land, reserv'd
A Victim for the Butcher of his Father.
Ah! take him from me! Hide his wand'ring Steps
In the deep Desarts, far remote from Tyrants.

S C E N E IV.

M E R O P E, N A R B A S, E U R I C L E S.

M E R O P E.

Know'st thou th' Excess of Horror, which involves me?

N A R B A S.

(54)

N A R B A S.

I know, the Ruin of my King is destin'd;
That, long in Chains, *Ægistus* is detain'd;
And that my Steps are mark'd.

M E R O P E.

'Tis I've destroy'd him.

N A R B A S.

You !

M E R O P E.

I've divulg'd the Whole. But, not a Savage,
What Mother, *Narbas*, on the point of losing
Her Flesh and Blood, could view him, and be silent?
I've spoke: 'tis done: and I must, from henceforth,
Repair my Weakness, by a sad Offence.

N A R B A S.

What say you of Offence?

S C E N E V.

M E R O P E, N A R B A S, E U R I C L E S,
I S M E N I A.

I S M E N I A.

Now, now's the Time,

Madam, for you to summon all your Forces,
And call up all the Vigour of your Soul.
A fickle People, running after Novelty,
With Earnestness attends your wish'd Espousals.
The Tyrant, by his monstrous Regulations,
Seems quite to be preparing for rude Slaughter,
Rather, than for a joyous Festival.
The Priest, inspir'd by his directing Mouth,
Has made the passive God to utter Sounds
Fictitious, in his venerable Temple.
In the great Name of your fam'd Ancestors,
And of the awful God, whom he invokes,

Just

Just now did he pronounce this hideous Union.
 You've giv'n, he says, as all *Messina* knows,
 Your Oath to *Polifont*: the conscious Gods
 Are Guarantees. The People join, in Cries
 Of far-resounding Joy, and thick Applauses:
 Nor, dreaming of the Grief, that bears you down,
 'Tend, on their Knees, these Nuptials full of Horror,
 Hailing the Tyrant, that has pierc'd your Heart.

M E R O P E.

So, my Distresses make the publick Joy.

N A R B A S.

What a sad, horrid, Way, to save your Son!

M E R O P E.

'Tis a dire Crime, and you already tremble.

N A R B A S.

But 'tis a greater, to give up your Son.

M E R O P E.

Hah! ye good Gods! Despair restores my Courage.
 Let's to the Temple, where they wait my Coming.
 Let's shew *Ægistus* to the thronging People,
 And place him in full View 'twixt me and th' Altar,
 Beneath th' assur'd Protection of the Gods.
 He is their Offspring, and They will at length
 Engage in his Defence. His Innocence
 Has long enough been wrestling with curst Treachery.
 I'll paint the Fury of this base Aflassin;
 Horror and Vengeance shall fill ev'ry Breast.
 Ye Tyrants, dread a Mother's Cries and Tears!
 They're coming. Ah! I shiver. All around
 Makes me despond. They call me, and my Son
 Is on the Brink of Fate. The Tyrant, yet,
 May with a Wink for ever seal his Ruin.
 Ye rig'rous Servants of the hated Monster,
 That loads me with unprecedented Sorrows,
 You're here to drag the Victim to the Altar.

O Vengeance! Tenderness! O Nature! Duty!
 What is your Cruelty about t' inflict
 On a poor Heart, abandon'd to Despair?

[*To the Assistants in the Sacrifice.*]

ACT V.

SCENE THE FIRST.

ÆGISTUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

NARBAS.

The Tyrant still within the royal Palace
 Detains us, and uncertain is our Destiny:
 But you alone ingross my shudd'ring Fears.
 Alas! my Prince! my Son! Once more permit me
 To call you by that sweet, that tender, Name.
 Ah! Live! Disarm the Choler of a Tyrant.
 Preserve a Head, alas! so necessary:
 Threat'ned thus long, and which so much has cost me.

EURICLES.

Consider, that, on your Account alone,
 Low'ring her Haughtiness, the Queen vouchsafes
 Once more to sprinkle with her trickling Tears
 (An inexhausted Source) the murtherous Hands
 Of a dire Tyrant, whom her Soul abhors.

ÆGISTUS.

From a long Consternation scarce recover'd,
 I, in some unknown World, a second Birth
 Seem to enjoy. New Blood warms all my Veins,
 New Day revives me with it's genial Rays.
 I born of *Merope*? My Sire *Cresfontius*?
 Triumphs th' Assassin; he inthron'd, and I
 A Slave? *Alcides*' Offspring, and in Chains?

NARBAS.

Would to the Gods, with me, this Heir of *Hercules*
 Lurk'd, undiscover'd, on the Plains of *Elis*!

ÆGISTUS.

ÆGISTUS.

What? Could I wish once more to undergo
 The World of Ills reserv'd for wretched Mortals?
 From my first Morn, fierce Rapine, Exile, Death,
 And ignominious Wants, besieg'd my Days.
 From Defard to rude Defart, wand'ring, persecuted,
 I languish'd out the Hours in sad Disgrace,
 And vile Obscurity. High Heav'n's my Witness,
 If I, mean while, amidst so many Injuries,
 Once let my Voice break out in plaintive Murmurs.
 Spite of Ambition, which devour'd my Heart,
 I Virtues, corresponding to my State,
 Embrac'd, pursued. You, you I honour'd still:
 I you, and ev'n your fell Distresses, lov'd;
 Nor of the Gods ask'd any other Father.
 They've giv'n another, and 'tis to abuse me.
 I am *Cresfontius*' Son, and can't avenge him.
 I've once more found a Mother; but the Tyrant
 Snatches her from me: whom the Monster holds,
 By foul Compulsion, in detested Bands.
 I've, in your Arms, oft curs'd the ill-starr'd Day,
 Presiding o'er my Birth: oft curs'd the Aid,
 Resulting from your Care. Alas! my Father!
 Why kept you back a desp'rate Mother's Hand,
 So oft prepar'd to give, in wild-Distracted,
 The speeding Blow? There then had been an End
 Of all my Woes: my Fate had been accomplish'd.

NARBAS.

Alas! you're lost. The Tyrant comes this Way:

SCENE II.

POLIFONT, ÆGISTUS, NARBAS,
 EURICLES, *Guards*.

POLIFONT.

Stand back!

[They retire a little.]

And as for thee, whose blinded Youth
 Inspires a Pity, which one owes to Weakness:

I

Thy

Thy King once more resigns it to thy Choice,
 For the last Time, to change thy Destiny.
 The Present, Future, all, down from thy Birth,
 In short, thy whole Existence, turns on me.
 I can exalt thee to the highest Rank,
 By one bare Word, or bind thee fast in Chains :
 Destroy, or save thee. Bred a-far from Courts,
 And unexperienc'd, leave thy wild Imprudence,
 And thoughtless Arrogance to my mild Management.
 Believe me, in thy low, abandon'd, State,
 This dang'rous Pride, which thou mistak'st for Virtue,
 Does not one Jot avail. If Fate decreed thee
 An obscure Origine, ignoble Parents ;
 Content with thy Condition, be submissive
 To thy Superiour. From a Race of Kings,
 By the great Gift of Fortune, if deriv'd ;
 Make thyself worthy to be so descended,
 By serving near my Person. In the Queen,
 Within this Palace, glares a great Example.
 She to my Laws has stoop'd, and, acquiescing
 To my Decrees, explores the sacred Temple.
 Pursue her Steps, and mine. Thou'lt hither come ;
 And on thy Knees, before the awful Altar,
 Swear to my Sceptre an eternal Homage.
 And, as thou fear'st the Gods, their Pow'r be Witness,
 Of this thy Vow, and strong-confirm'd Allegiance.
 The Gate to Grandeur is wide-open to thee.
 Refusal will destroy thee. Choose, and answer.

ÆGISTUS.

You see me all disarm'd : how can I answer ?
 I own, there's something, in thy wild Discourse,
 That nigh confounds me. But, restore me only
 The Sword, thou dread'st, that faithful Steel, thy Craft
 Wrench'd from my Hands, and I shall soon return,
 Unurg'd, an Answer ; whence thou'lt learn, perfidious,
 Which of us Two's the Slave, or Which the Master ;
 If 'tis thy Part to regulate my Fates,
 Or mine to punish impious, bold, Assassins. POLI-

POLIFONT.

Foe, impotent and Proud! my Gentleness
 Confirms thee in thy Insolence. You think,
 I'm great enough of Soul, to let this Outrage
 Pass unregarded; nor shall sink so low,
 As to chastize, in thee, a worthless Slave,
 That dares assault his King. And well it is,
 This Goodness, which is now exasperated,
 Now cools again in turn, affords thy Wretchedness
 One only Moment to obtain thy Pardon.
 I wait thee at the Altars; you may thither
 Direct thy Steps. Approach, prepar'd to meet
 Sure Death, or swear Obedience to my Throne.
 Guards, you near me may place him. Let none else
 Presume to introduce him. To your Hands,
*Narb*as and *Euricles*, I now consign him.
 Tremble! You'll answer for his vain Caprices.
 I am not unacquainted with your Hatred:
 And know it's Impotence; but trust, at least,
 To your Experience. Whether he descends
 From *Merope*, or born of you, his Death
 Shall be the Purchase of imprudent Counsel.

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

ÆGISTUS.

Alas! No Aid will I receive, alone
 Depending on the Blood, that warms my Veins.
 Great *Hercules*! instruct my Arm to r'avenge
 Perfidious Guilt, and complicated Murther.
 And, from the Bosom of th' immortal Gods,
 Vouchsafe thy pow'rful Influence on my Soul!
 Before thy Altars I by *Polifont*
 Am summon'd, and do thither urge my Way.

NARBAS.

My Prince! ah! are you living?

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

In this Danger,

If we, at least, might follow you ! But leave
To us the Time t' awake a Party, which,
All feeble as it is, is not annihilated.
Permit —

ÆGISTUS.

At any other Time, my Courage,
Bridled by your Instructions, would be supple,
And docile, as a Child. I could repose
In Both firm Confidence : but, in Misfortunes,
Of this dire Class, none ought to be consulted,
But Heav'n, and one's own Heart. Who's unresolv'd,
Gives himself up to Counsels : but the Blood
Of Heroes, in this Case, relies on no one.
My Lot is cast. — Heav'ns ! What now strikes my
Hah ! *Merope* ! [Eyes ?]

SCENE IV.

MEROPE, ÆGISTUS, *Attendants.*

MEROPE.

The proud, presumptive, Tyrant
Commands me on an Embassy to thee.
Think not I live, since these enormous Nuptials.
But this foul, hideous, Shame, to which I'm drag'd,
I've undergone for thee ; for thee, distracted,
Made this Effort. Now struggle for thyself,
And fix thy Fate. Dear Object of the Terroures,
That shake my Soul, the Cause of all my Fears !
O sprung from Kings, and Gods ! my Son *Ægistus* !
We must know how to suffer, e'er we know
How to avenge. I see thou'rt all on Fire,
At my poor Weakness. I now love thee more,
And am far more alarm'd. My Son !

ÆGISTUS.

Dare follow me.

MEROPE.

Oh ! Stop ! What is't thou do'st ? Ye Gods ! my Soul
Complains to you of his Excess of Virtue.

ÆGISTUS

ÆGISTUS.

Is not my Father's Tomb before your Eyes?
Hear you his Voice? Are you a Queen and Mother?
If so, march on!

MEROPE.

It looks, as if high Heaven,
At this Conjuncture, made thee more than mortal.
I own my Blood; I see the Blood of *Hercules*.
O Speak! and fill me with the God, that guides thee.
He urges, he inspires thee. O my Son!
Godlike, go on, and raise my drooping Spirits.

ÆGISTUS.

Shall you have any Friends in this sad Temple?

MEROPE.

I had, when on the Throne. Those few that still
Espouse my Fate, beneath a foreign Yoke,
Hang down their humbled Heads. A Load of Evils
Crushes their Virtue. *Polifont* is hated;
And yet he wears the Crown. I'm lov'd, and shun'd.

ÆGISTUS.

What! shun'd by all? This Monster, is he at
The Altar?

MEROPE.

He attends me there.

ÆGISTUS.

His Soldiers,
Do they now guard him at this horrid Altar?

MEROPE.

No: the Gate's freed from those outrageous Bands:
It is surrounded by a faithless Herd
Of the same Courtiers, whom I've heretofore
Saw crowding to my Train, and cringing servily
Under my Orders. As for me, I, girt
By his own Tribe of Creatures at the Altar,
Can only to thy single self give Entrance
To these Abodes.

ÆGISTUS.

Then singly will I follow you.
I there shall find the Gods, that punish Murder;
And are my Ancestors,

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

These fifteen Years

Have they betray'd thee.

ÆGISTUS.

They, indeed, have try'd me:

MEROPE.

Ah! what is thy Design?

ÆGISTUS.

Come, let's march on,

Whate'er it cost. Adieu! my mournful Friends!
 You'll be convinc'd, at least, the Son of *Merope*
 Has merited your Cares. You shall not blush,

Embracing Narbas.

Believe me, at thy Work: but be a Witness
 Of the high Blood I'm form'd of.

SCENE V.

NARBAS, EURICLES.

NARBAS.

What wild Scheme

Is he pursuing? All my Labours are
 Alas! unravell'd, and my Cares betray'd.
 Your habile Traytors ever go unpunish'd.
 I always hop'd Time's sure, tho' ling'ring, Hand,
 Vindictive, would do Justice to the Gods,
 By heaping Vengeance on the vile Offender:
 That young *Ægistus* would regain his Empire,
 So long usurp'd.—But monstrous Guilt transports him,
 And I must end my toilsome Days, deceiv'd.
 Impetuous Courage will destroy *Ægistus*.
 He'll disobey, and Death will be his Portion.

EURICLES.

Hear you the Cries, that shoot along the Air?

NARBAS.

They are the Signal of dire Guilt.

EURICLES.

Hark!

NARBAS.

N A R B A S.

Tremble!

E U R I C L E S.

No Doubt, the Moment she espous'd curst *Polifont*,
The Queen, by Death, prevented her foul Shame.
This was the Purpose of her lab'ring Soul,
Under such mortal Trouble.

N A R B A S.

Ah! her Son

Is then no more. She only liv'd for him.

E U R I C L E S.

The Uproar gathers Ground: it now redoubles:
And comes like Thunder, grumbling in the Air,
Hurling it's Bolts on Earth.

N A R B A S.

On ev'ry Side,

I hear the Cries of Combatants; the Sounds
Of Trumpets, and the Voice of dying Citizens.
Burst are the Palace' Gates.

E U R I C L E S.

Ah! don't you see

A cruel Party, borne with great Rapidity,
Urging their Way, tumultuous, at a Distance?

N A R B A S.

Press they, subservient to the Tyrant's Rage?

E U R I C L E S.

Far as my Eyes can throw their kenning Pow'rs,
Rages disastrous Conflict.

N A R B A S.

What Blood now

Is to distain the Sword? The Names of *Merope*
And of the King fill all the wounded Air.

E U R I C L E S.

Thanks to th' immortal Gods, the Ways are open.
Let's go this Instant, and survey our Fate,
If we're to live, or die.

[Exit.

N A R B A S.

N A R B A S.

Let's go. Can't I
Keep equal Pace? Ye gracious Gods! restore
Force to this Arm enervate, heretofore
Tried in my Sov'reign's Cause. What Life, at least,
I have remaining, let me consecrate
To this just Service. Let's away!

S C E N E VI.

N A R B A S, I S M E N I A, *People.*

N A R B A S.

What Spectacle!
I'ft you, *Ifmenia*? Bloody thus, and breathless,
I'ft you, I see?

I S M E N I A.

Let me regain my Life,
Alas! and Voice.

N A R B A S.

My Son, Oh! is he living?
Where, where's the Queen? Ah! good *Ifmenia*, speak!

I S M E N I A.

With much ado I've got once more my Spirits;
Borne by the floating Concourfe of these People
To these Abodes —

N A R B A S.

What is *Ægistus* doing?

I S M E N I A.

He is — the worthy Offspring of the Gods.
Ægistus! he has struck a noble Stroke.
Alcides ne'er, with all his matchless Valour,
Surpriz'd the World, with such a bold Atchievement.

N A R B A S.

My Son! my King! Rais'd by these Hands to Manhood!

I S M E N I A.

The Victim was prepar'd, and crown'd with Flowers;
The Altar sparkled with the Nuptial Torches.
When *Polifont* to trembling *Merope*,

H

His Eyes fix'd sternly, and of brutal Aspect,
 Presented his dire Hand. The Priest pronounc'd
 The sacred Words : and to the festal Shrines
 The Queen, amidst her Women all in Tears,
 Advancing sadly, shudd'ring in my Arms,
 Instead of Nuptials, calls down Vengeance on him.
 The People mark'd the whole in solemn Silence.
 Into the holy Circle, at this Instant,
 Hurried a Youth, a Hero, like the Gods.
 He runs, it was *Ægistus*, shoots along
 To the crown'd Altars, gives himself a Spring ;
 And, with sure Hold, gripes fast the Axe, prepar'd
 For this tremendous Festival. Keen Lightnings
 Flash not so quick : I saw him with these Eyes :
 Saw the blest Hand, that smote th' audacious Monster.
 Die, Tyrant, said he. Take, ye Gods, your Victim !
Erox, Partaker of his Master's Crimes,
Erox, who view'd him, swimming in his Blood,
 Up-lifts his hardy Hand, and thought t'avenge him.
Ægistus turns about, inflam'd with Rage,
 And lays him flat along his Master's Side.
 Raising himself, the Tyrant wounds the Hero.
 Their mingled Gore I streaming saw in Floods.
 The Guard makes off with dismal Cries of Murder.
 His Mother—Ah ! how Love inspires high Courage !
 What Transports fir'd her Efforts, and her Steps !
 His Mother—shoots along 'midst all the Soldiers.—
 It is my Son : stay, hold, inhuman Herd !
 It is my Son. Tear up your Queen, his Mother ;
 Tear up this Breast, that gave him Nourishment ;
 These Bowels, that once bore him. These sad Cries
 Put all the People in a dreadful Tumult.
 A Body of our Friends, in fore Alarm
 At her dire Danger, head-long rush betwixt
 Her and the Soldiers. Strait the holy Altars
 Were all despoil'd ; the shining Ruins floating
 In Pools of Blood. Poor Infants crush'd to Death,
 In their sad Mothers' Arms. Brothers, unknown,

Fell by their Brother's Hand. Priests, Soldiers, Friends,
 Expiring on each Other. We attempt
 To fly, but are forc'd back, in wild Dismay ;
 And the thick Crowd is twenty Times repuls'd,
 From one End of the Temple to the other.
 Th' impetuous Floating of this Multitude
 Bears young *Ægistus* and the Queen away,
 Far from my Sight. Amidst the Combatants
 I fly all bloody ; screaming loud, enquire
 Of the distracted Crowd. But all, they answer,
 Redoubles my rude Horrors. He, he's dead,
 They cry ; He's fallen, he's crown'd with Victory.
 I run, quite spend myself, the People drag me ;
 Haul me in this Uncertainty, oppress'd
 With over-flowing Sorrows, to this Palace,
 'Midst dying Combatants, Deaths, direful Ruins.
 Come, trace my Steps, and join my doleful Cries !
 Come ; I'm uncertain, if the Queen be safe ;
 If her thrice-worthy Son survive ; or whether
 The Tyrant be no more. Frights, anxious Trouble,
 All these outrageous Storms, still seize my Heart.

N A R B A S.

Thou Arbiter of Mortals, Heav'nly Providence !
 Accomplish thy great Work, and spotless Innocence
 Support, propitious ! Let thy destin'd Benefices
 Be in Proportion to our past Misfortunes.
 Ye Gods ! preserve *Ægistus*, and I end [diers,
 My harass'd Days in Peace. Ah ! 'mongst these Sol-
 Don't I behold the wretched, captive, Queen ?

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, NARBAS,
*People, Soldiers. The Corps of Polifont cover'd with
 a bloody Robe is exposed at the farther Part of the Stage.*

MEROPE.

Priests, Warriours, Friends, Citizens of *Messina*,
 By the great Gods, th' Avengers of Iniquity,
 Listen

Listen, ye People ! I once more attest,
 On solemn Oath, *Ægistus* is your King.
 He Guilt has punish'd, and reveng'd his Father.
 The Wretch you see drag'd in the Dust's a Monster,
 Hateful to Gods and Men. He plung'd his Hands
 Deep in *Cresfontius'* Breast, my Spouse *Cresfontius*,
 Once my Support, your King. Beneath the Strokes
 Of this transcendent Tyrant, hapless, fell
 Two of my Sons. He sore oppress'd *Messina*,
 Usurp'd my Rank ; and offer'd me a Hand,
 Reeking with my own Blood. The Youth you view,
 The Vanquisher of *Polifont*, descends { *Running to-*
 From your own Kings, he is *Cresfontius'* } *wards Ægistus,*
[Seed: { *with an Axe*
} *in his Hand.*
 He's mine, the only one my Grievs enjoy.
 What Evidence more certain would you have,
 Than your Queen's Heart ? Behold this good old Man !
 His Prudence from the Traytor's murth'rous Hand
 Snatch'd the just-budding Years of young *Ægistus* ;
 The Gods have done the rest.

N A R B A S.

Yes, I attest

These conscious Gods, it is your King, who sweat
 In this hot Conflict.

Æ G I S T U S.

Can you, well, forget

A Mother ? or a Son, whom she defends ?
 A Son, who nobly has reveng'd his Father ?
 A King, th' Avenger of enormous Guilt ?

M E R O P E.

And, if you doubt it, let the Strokes, he dealt,
 Let your Deliv'rance, and his Intrepidity
 Of Soul, evince it. Hah ! what other Mortal,
 But a Descendant from *Alcides'* Race,
 Brought up in Mis'ry, scarce yet in his Bloom,
 At his first Trial of heroic Manhood,
 Could lay fell Tyrants flat ? He to his People

K 2

Will

Will be a firm Support : and, fix'd in Virtue,
 Avenge the Earth. Hark ! Lo ! the Voice of Heaven !
 D'y' hear it's Thunder ? How the awful Sounds
 Fall in with mine, and witness he's my Son !

SCENE the LAST,
 MEROPÉ, ÆGISTUS, ISMENIA,
 NARBAS, EURICLES, *People.*

EURICLES.

Madam, display your Person to the City,
 Once more becalm'd. The News, that's spread abroad,
 Of their King's safe Return, from Mouth to Mouth
 • Flying with swift Career, has chang'd their Spirits.
 Our Friends harangu'd, and ev'ry Heart is melting.
 The People shed, impatient, Tears of Joy :
 Adore the King, whom gracious Heav'n has sent 'em :
 Bless your great Son, and bless your wond'rous Love :
 And consecrate, for ever, this dreadful Day.
 They, eager, his august, heroic, Visage
 Flock to contemplate ; flock to see their *Narbas* ;
 And pay you Homage. All around the Name
 Of *Polifont* spreads complicated Horror :
 That of your Son and your's, draws Adoration.
 O Monarch ! Come, enjoy the Fruits of Victory.
 This Fruit's our ardent Love, worth more than Glory.

ÆGISTUS

That is not mine : this Glory is the Gods ;
 As Happiness, so Virtue, comes from them.
 Let's mount the Throne, in placing there my Mother :
 And, my dear *Narbas*, ever by *Ægistus*
 Be honour'd with a Father's sacred Name.

The End.



L E T T E R

On W I T.

A Certain Person, who had some Insight into the human Heart, was one Day consulted about a Tragedy, that was going to be brought on the Stage: he intimated, that there was so much Wit in the Piece, that he doubted very much of its Success. What! will some one say, can this be a Faulty in that Performance, at a Time, when all the World affects to be witty; when no one sets his Pen to Paper, but with a View to shew he has some share of this peculiar Facult; when even the notoriously false Kinds of Wit meet with Applause, provided the Thoughts are but brilliant! Yes, without Doubt; a Piece will be applauded one Day, and be surfeiting the next.

That Thing, call'd Wit, is sometimes a new Comparison, sometimes a fine Allusion: in this Place, the Abuse of a Word, presented in one Sense, and liable to be understood in another: in that, a delicate Connection of two uncommon Ideas: 'tis a Metaphor, a little singular: 'tis a Search after that, which the Object does not present at first Sight, but which still in Effect, is in the Object: 'tis the Art either of uniting two Things naturally remote from each other, or of separating two Things, that seem to be connected; or in placing one in Opposition to the other: 'tis that of delivering one's Thoughts by halves, in order to leave room for Divination. In a Word, I would discuss all the different Ways of shewing of Wit, had I more of it than I have. But all these bright Properties (I don't speak of false Brilliancy) do not occur, or, at least, very rarely, in a serious Work, and which ought to be interesting. The Reason of it is, that, in that Case, the Author makes his Appearance; whereas the Public would only be glad to see the Hero, who is ever, either in Distress, or in Danger. Danger and Distresses call not for Wit. *Priam* and *Hecuba* don't fall to making of Epigrams, when their Children were Murther'd, amidst the Flames of *Troy*. Nor does *Dido* breathe her Sighs in Madrigals, when she mounts the Pile, to sacrifice herself. *Demosthenes* is quite void of pretty Thoughts, while he is rousing the *Athenians*, and spiriting them up to War. If he had not, he would have acted the Part of a Rhetorician; whereas he is now performing the Function of a Statesman.

The Art of the admirable *Racine* is far superior to that we call Wit. But if *Pyrrhus* was always to express himself in this Stile: 'Tho'

Tho' vanquish'd, bound in Chains, consum'd in Sorrows,
And burning with more Flames, than e'er I kindled,
I could not be so cruel ah ! as you are ?

If *Orestes* was to be still in this Taste,

The *Scythians* are less cruel than *Hermione*.

These two Personages would not make the least Impression. We should be soon sensible, that true Passion very rarely recurs to such Comparisons, as these ; and that there is scarce any Proportion between real Flames, which consumed *Troy*, and the Flames of Love, which had seized *Pyrrhus* ; between the *Scythians*, who sacrifice the human Species, and *Hermione*, who has no great Affection for *Orestes*. *Cinna*, speaking of *Pompey*, utters himself in these Terms :

Heav'n chose his Death, for an eternal Monument
Of this great change ; and the distinguish'd Honour,
Ow'd to the *Manes* of this godlike Man,
Of bearing with them to the silent Shades
The Liberty of *Rome*.

There is Something very grand and brilliant in this Thought : it contains a great deal of Wit, and even an Air of Majesty, that imposes on us. I am certain, that these Verses, pronounc'd with a Theatrical Air and Enthusiasm, would receive considerable Applause : but, I am assured, at the same Time, that the Play of *Cinna*, were it wrote all thro' in this Kind of Taste, would not have a Run for many Nights.

In Reality, what Obligation has Heaven to do *Pompey* the Honour of enslaving *Rome* after his Decease ? A contrary Conduct would carry a better Face of Probability : And the *Manes* of *Pompey* ought rather to obtain of Heaven the eternal Maintenance of this Liberty, for the Sake of which, 'tis supposed, he fought, and died.

Should it then be look'd upon as any other, than a Work, stuff'd with Thoughts, far-fetch'd and problematical ? How much superiour to all these glaring Ideas are these simple and natural Lines ?

On Recollection, *Cinna*,
Will you assassinate me ? Let's be Friends.
Cinna, you are my Guest : 'tis I invite you.

This is not what we stile Wit : 'tis the simple and sublime, in which consists true Beauty.

Where, in *Rodogune*, *Antiochus* says of his Mistress, who was quitting of him, after having shamefully propos'd to him to kill his Mother.

She flies ; but as a *Parthian*,
Piercing my Heart.

Antiochus

Antiochus has Wit: he is making an Epigram on *Rodogune*; ingeniously comparing the last Words, she speaks at parting, to the Arrows, which the *Parthians* shoot, flying. But the Proposition of killing his Mother is not darted at him, because his Mistress is on the Point of leaving him: for, whether she goes, or stays, *Antiochus* is equally wounded. The Epigram therefore is vitious: and, if *Rodogune* alters her Mind, there is not the least Foundation for the Witticism.

I purposely pick'd out these Examples from our best Writers, in order to their making the stronger Impression. And I omit touching on those Quirks and Quibbles, that appear faulty at first Sight. There is no one can help laughing, when, in the Tragedy of *Medea*, her Rival tells her, by way of Allusion to her Sorceries,

I've but Attractions, you have Charms. —

Corneille found the Stage, and all Kinds of Literature, infested with these Puerilities, which are very rarely to be admitted. I would not be understood to be speaking here of those Strokes of Wit, which might be indulged on other Occasions, tho' improper in a serious Treatise. One might apply to the Writers of this Class a Saying of *Plutarch's*, so happily translated by *Amiot*: *Tu tiens, sans propos, beaucoup de bon propos*. You have several very good Things, but they are not to the Purpose.

I now call to Mind one of those bright Performances, which I have seen quoted, as a Model, in several Works of Taste, and even in the Treatise, on Study, of the late Mr. *Rollin*. This Scrap is extracted from the fine Funeral Oration of the Great *Turenne*, composed by *Flecbier*. 'Tis true, in this Oration, *Flecbier* has almost come up to the Sublimity of *Bossuet*, whom I have filed, and do still file the only eloquent Man among so many elegant Writers: but, notwithstanding, I am of Opinion, that the Passage, I am hinting at, had never been made use of by the Bishop of *Meaux*. Here it is. “Ye Powers, in Enmity
“ with *France*, you are still living: and the Spirit of Christian
“ Charity will not permit me to breathe a single Wish for your
“ Death &c. But you live; and I deplore, in this Pulpit, a
“ virtuous Captain, whose Intentions were ever pure, &c.”

An Apostrophe in this Taste had been very proper at *Rome*, in the Time of the Civil War, after the Assassination of *Pompey*; or at *London*, after the Murder of *Charles* the First; because, in Effect, it might have promoted their respective Interests. But is it consistent with Decency to wish directly, in the Pulpit, the Death of the Emperor, the King of *Spain*, and Electoral Princes, and to put in the Ballance with them, the General of a King's Army, who is at War with them? The Intentions of an Officer, which can be only to serve his Prince, ought they to be put in Competition with the political Interests of all the Crown'd Heads, against

against whom he makes the Campaigne ? What would one say of a *German*, that had wish'd for the Death of a King of *France*, on Occasion of the Loss of General *Merci*, whose Intentions were pure ?

Why then has this Passage been ever cried up by all our Rhetoricians ? Because the Figure is, in itself, fine and pathetic. But they never examined the Drift and Propriety of the Thought. *Plutarch* would have told *Flecbier* : *Tu a iennu, sans propos, un très beau propos.*

I return now to my Paradox : that all these bright Ideas, which we term Wit, ought never to be admitted in great Works, design'd either to instruct, or to move the Passions : and I'll take upon me to declare also, that they ought to be banish'd from our Operas. Musick expresses the Passions, Sentiments, Images : but what Sounds of Harmony can exhibit the Turn of an Epigram ? *Quinault* was for some time out of Vogue, but he was ever natural, notwithstanding.

Of all our Operas, that which is the most set off, or rather loaded, with this Epigrammatical Wit, is the Interlude of the Triumph of Arts, compos'd by a delightful Man, who had always fine Sentiments, and who, at the same time, was very happy in his Expression ; but one, who, by abusing this Talent, contributed, in some small Measure, to the Declension of Literature, after the glorious Days of *Lewis XIV.*

Love, in this Piece, disputes with *Apollo* the Honour of being the God of Arts. *Apollo*, in speaking of this Pretension of Love, delivers himself in these Words :

But the Honour,
Which he would strip me of, is the bright Property
Of *France's* Hero, no less than 'tis mine.
Let not this Monarch, so august, be robb'd
Of his just Share : the Arts owe more to him,
Than what they do to Love, or me.

This Idea, I think, is ingenious : but then there is a Necessity of giving one's self the Trouble, beforehand, of interpreting the first Words, which would import a Meaning to this Effect : *Love does me a great deal of Honour, in being ambitious, like me, of becoming the God of Arts* : and after that, tho' the Thought is explain'd, I am apt to think, that the most ready Master would find much Difficulty in adapting proper Musick to the Expression.

In the same Interlude, where *Pygmalion* animates the Statue, he says to it :

Your first Motions
Have been to love me,

I remem-

I remember, I have often, in my Youth, heard these Words applauded. But, who is not aware, that the Motions of the Body of the Statue are here confounded with those of the Heart, and that, in neither Sense, the Phrase is *French*; being, in Reality, nothing but a Quirk, and Conundrum? How is it possible, that a Man, of so much Wit, should not yet have enough to retrench these glaring Faults?

These Sallies of the Imagination, these Finesses, and Turns, these equivocal Touches, Gaities, short curtail'd Sentences, ingenious Familiarities, with which the present Age so much abounds, are not at all proper but for small Works, design'd purely for Amusement. *Perrault's* Front of the *Louvre* is simple and majestic. A Closet might very well admit, without any Impropriety, small Ornaments. Be as witty, as you please, or even 'tis possible for you to be, in a Madrigal, in Verses on a light Subject, in a Scene of a Comedy, that is neither passionate, nor grave, in a Compliment, a small Romance, in a Letter, where you are gay in order to divert your Friends.

Far from reflecting on *Voiture*, for having scatter'd Wit here and there in his Letters, I have, on the contrary, discover'd, that he does not over and above abound with it, tho' he is ever in Quest of it. 'Tis generally observ'd, that Dancing-Masters make but indifferent Bows, as being always for overdoing it. I am apt to imagine, this was frequently the Case of *Voiture*. His best Letters are studied. 'Tis plain, that he harrasses himself, in order to muster up, what so naturally occurs to Count *Anthony Hamilton*, to *Madam de Seigné*, and to so many other Ladies; who write, without any Pains, these Trifles, better than *Voiture* did, with all his Application.

Boileau, who had the Hardiness, in his first Satires, to compare *Voiture* to *Horace*, alter'd his Sentiments, when his Taste was ripen'd by Age. I am confident, 'tis of small Consequence to the Affairs of this World, whether *Voiture* be, or be not, a great Genius; whether he has only wrote some pretty Letters, or whether all his Works of Humour are Models in their Kind. But, as to us, who cultivate Arts, and are enamour'd of them, we take a very exact Survey of what the rest of the World looks upon with an Eye of Indifference. Good Taste is our Business, in Point of Literature, as much as Dress is that of the Ladies. And, provided we don't make a Party-Affair of it, I think, I may pronounce, without any Hestation, that *Voiture* has very little of Excellency; and that *Marot* might be easily reduced to a narrow Compass.

'Tis not, that one would rob them of their Reputation. On the contrary, one would examine, with all the Justice in Nature, That, which has procured them this establish'd Reputation; and which are the real Beauties, that have skreen'd their Defects. 'Tis necessary, we should have a right Notion of what we are to adopt,

and what reject. This is the essential Fruit of profound Application to the Study of polite Learning. 'Tis what put *Horace* on criticizing on the old Satyrift, *Lucilius*. *Horace* made himself some Enemies by this Conduct; but, at long run, he clear'd up the Eyes of these Enemies themselves.

This great Ambition of Shining, and of putting what has been said a thousand Times before into a new Dress, is the Source of unheard of Expressions, as well as far-fetched Thoughts.

He that is incapable of producing any fine Sentiment is willing, at least, to distinguish himself by his Manner of Expression. 'Tis for this Reason, in the last Place, that we see *Amabilités* substituted for the Word *Agréments*, *Négligement* for *Négligence*, *badiner les Amours*, for *badiner avec les Amours*. There are a hundred other Affectations of this Nature. If one were to go on after this Fashion, the Language of our *Bossuets*, *Racines*, *Pascats*, *Corneilles*, *Boileaus*, *Fenelons*, would soon grow superannuated. Why should we decline an Expression, in Use, to introduce another exactly of the same Signification? A new Term is no otherwise pardonable, but when it is absolutely necessary, intelligible, and sonorous. One is obliged to coin such Words in Physics. A new Discovery, a new Machine, requires a new Term. But are there any fresh Discoveries, in regard of the human Heart? Is there any other Majesty of Style, but that of *Corneille* and *Bossuet*? Are there any other Passions, but those, that are handled by *Racine*, and touch'd upon by *Quinault*? Is there any other Morality of the Gospel, but that of Father *Bourdaloue*? Those that tax our Language with not being copious enough, ought in reality, to point out its Sterility; but that is only subsisting in themselves.

Rem Verba Sequuntur.

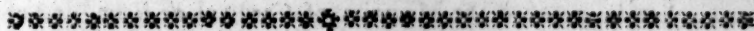
When one is thoroughly Master of an Idea, when Wit perfectly just, and full of Warmth, takes Possession, as it were, of any Sentiment; it starts from the Brain, entirely adorn'd with suitable Expressions, as *Minerva*, arm'd from Head to Foot, sprung from the Head of *Jupiter*.

I am sensible, that this Comparison would have been preposterous in another place; but you will pardon it in this Letter. In a Word, the Conclusion of all I have been saying, is; that there is no Necessity to be on the Rack, either for Thoughts, Turns, or Expressions; and that the Art, in all great Works, is to reason well, without heaping together many Arguments; to be a good Painter, without affecting to be an universal Painter; to move the Passions, without designing to put them eternally in a Ferment.

I am here, unquestionably, laying down good Advice. But, have I my self taken it? Alas! No.

Pauci, quos aquus amavit

*Jupiter, aut ardens vexit ad aethera Virtus,
Diis geniti potuere.*



New Reflections on HISTORY.

PERHAPS, What is already the Case in regard of Physicks, may in a short time be establish'd as a Rule, in respect of the Method of writing History. New Discoveries have banish'd the antient Systems. One would willingly be acquainted with Human Nature, in this interesting Particular, which constitutes at present the Basis of Natural Philosophy.

We begin now to give very little Credit to *Curtius's* Adventure, who sloop'd up a Quicksand, by falling to the Bottom, he and his Horse : we laugh at Shields descending from Heaven, and all those fine *Talismans*, which the Gods so liberally presented to Mortals ; and at the *Vestals*, who set a Vessel o' float with their Girdle ; and at all that Multitude of celebrated Fooleries, which the old Historians are stuff'd with. Nor are we a jot more pleas'd with a famous Rhetorician ; when, in his antient History, he talks seriously of King *Nabis*, who prostituted his Wife to whoever brought him Money, and placed those, who came empty-handed, in the Arms of a fine Poppet, exactly like the Queen, stuck full of Pins under its Petticoats.

It makes one smile to see such a Number of Authors telling the same Story one after the other, how the famous *Otho*, Archbishop of *Mayence*, was besieged, and eat up, by an Army of Rats, in the Year 968 ; how Showers of Blood overflow'd *Goscony* in 1017 ; how two Armies of Serpents engaged in Battle near *Tournay* in 1059 : Prodigies, Predictions, Ordeal Trials, &c. are at present in the same Class, as the Accounts of *Herodotus*.

My Design is to say something, here, of Modern History : where we are in no Danger of meeting with either Poppets embracing Courtiers, or with Bishops, devour'd by Rats.

Great Care is taken to tell us what Day a Battle was fought, and they are in the right on't. One prints Treatises, describes the Pomp of a Coronation, the Ceremony of receiving the red Hat, and even the Entry of an Ambassador, where neither his *Swiss*, nor his Lackies go unrecorded. 'Tis very convenient to have Archives at large, to recur to on Occasions : and, at present, I look upon all voluminous Works, as so many Dictionaries. But, after turning over three or four thousand Descriptions of Battles, and the Substance of some Hundreds of Treatises, I could not find, in the main, I was a Pin's Head the wiser : meeting with Nothing in them, but a Relation of Events. I was not made more acquainted with the *French* and *Saracens*, by the Battle of *Charles Martel*, than I was with the *Turks* and

Tartars, by the Victory obtain'd by *Tamerlane* over *Bajazet*. I own, that in perusing the Memoirs of Cardinal *de Retz*, and of Madame *de Motteville*, I know exactly, Word for Word, what the Queen-Mother said to Mons^r *de Jersay*: that I apprehend how the Coadjutor contributed to the Blockades: and that I can repeat the Heads of the long Harangue he made to the Duchess of *Eouillon*. Such Works feed very much one's Curiosity; but serve very little for one's Instruction.

There are Books, which apprise me of the true or false Anecdotes of a Court. Whoever has seen Courts, or has a Longing to see them, is as fond of these illustrious Trifles, as a Country Dame is of knowing all the News of her little Neighbourhood. 'Tis, at the Bottom, the same Thing, and the same Merit. The Publick under *Harry IV.* was entertain'd with the Anecdotes of *Charles IX.* They speak still of the Duke of *Bellegarde*, who flourish'd in the Infancy of *Lewis XIV.* All these Tracts in Miniature last a Generation, or two, and then are buried in an eternal Oblivion.

We, in the mean while, on their Account, let slip Opportunities of making Acquaintance with what would be of more sensible Advantage to us, and much more durable. I should be glad to inform myself, what the Strength of a Nation was before a War; and whether this Strength has been increased, or impair'd, by such a War: whether *Spain* was richer before her Conquest of the New World, than she is at this Day. How much more she was peopled in the Time of *Charles V.* than under *Philip IV.* How *Amsterdam*, two hundred Years ago, could scarce contain twenty thousand Souls; whereas, at present, there are not in it less than two hundred and forty Thousand; and how we are positively assured of This: How much the *English* Nation is increased in the Number of its People, since the Reign of *Harry VIII.* Whether it be true, what is asserted in the *Persian* Letters, that there are not Men enough in the World, and that the Earth was depopulated, in Comparison of what it was two thousand Years ago. *Rome*, indeed, had more Citizens then, than she has at this Period of Time. I allow, that *Alexandria* and *Carthage* were great Cities: but *Paris*, *London*, *Constantinople*, *Grand Cairo*, *Amsterdam*, and *Hambourg*, had in those Days no Existence. There were three hundred Nations of the *Gauls*: but those three hundred Nations were not equivalent to Our's, either in point of Number of Inhabitants, or Industry. *Germany* was a Forest; which is now stored with a hundred great, and opulent, Cities.

It looks, as if the Spirit of Criticism, quite weary of persecuting only Particulars, has engross'd the Universe for its Object. 'Tis a continual Cry, that the World is degenerated, and,
moreover,

moreover, that it is depopulated. What? Must we then regret, we did not live in those Times, when there was no Highway from *Bordeaux* to *Orleans*; and when *Paris* was a small Village, wherein one might have one's Throat cut? One may with Confidence affirm, that *Europe* is better peopled, than formerly, and that the Men surpass Those of past Ages. One may know every Year, how *Europe*, in Reality, is peopled: because, almost in all the great Cities, at the End of every Year, is publish'd a List of the Births: and, according to an exact and sure Rule which a Gentleman of *Holland*, of Parts as well as indefatigable Industry, has laid us down, one may calculate the Number of Inhabitants, by that of the Births. Behold already one of the Objects of the Curiosity of whoever has a Mind to read History, as a Common-Wealth's-Man and a Philosopher. He will be far from being content with this little Knowledge: but will enquire what has been the radical Vice, and predominant Virtue, of a Nation: whence has arose her Strength, or Weakness, by Sea: by what Means, and to what Degree, she has been enriched an Age past. This may be learnt from a List of her Exportations. One would be desirous of knowing, how Arts, and Manufactures, have been establish'd; by following them in their Progress from one Country to another. Change of Customs and Laws, in short, he will be more than ordinarily attentive to. By this Method, we should be furnish'd with a History of Mankind, in Lieu of reading an insignificant Detail of Kings and Courts.

'Tis to no Purpose I turn over the Annals of *France*; as our Historians are all silent as to these Particulars.

None of them have been entitled to this Motto: *Homo sum, Humani Nil a me alienum puto*. In my Opinion, then, these Materials ought to be artfully put together, and connected by a continued Thread of Events.

This, I am persuaded, is the only Method of writing Modern History, like a true Politician, and real Philosopher. To give a Treatise of Ancient History, is, I think, to compile some Truths, and to mix them with a thousand Lies. A History of this Nature, perhaps, is only useful in the same Manner, as Fable is, in Consequence of great Events, that are the perpetual Subject of our Paintings, Poems, Conversations, and which furnish Treatises of Morality. We must know the Exploits of *Alexander*, as we are acquainted with the Labours of *Hercules*.

In a Word, this Ancient History seems to me, in regard of the Modern, that, which old Medals are in Comparison of current Money. The former we lock up in our Cabinets, the latter circulates round the World to carry on the Commerce of Mankind.

L E T T E R

TO MR NORBERG,

*Chaplain to the King of Sweden, CHARLES XII.
Author of the History of that Monarch.*

PERMIT me, Sir, as I having taken upon me the Task of reading what you have already publish'd of your History of *Charles XII.* to represent to you some just Complaints, both in regard of the Manner with which you treat this History, and that, which you make use of in your Preface, in respect of Those, who have treated it before you.

We love Truth : but the old Proverb, *All Truths are not proper to be told*, regards principally unprofitable Truths. Vouchsafe to recollect this Passage in the Preface of the History of *Monf. de Voltaire*. *Thy History of a Prince*, says he, *is not to recount All he has done, but only that, which he has done worthy of being transmitted to Posterity.*

There may, perhaps, be Readers, who would be glad to see the Catechisme, which *Charles XII.* was taught : and to be apprized with a great deal of Pleasure, (a) that in the Year 1693, Doctor *Peter Rudbekins* gave the Doctor's Cap to the Masters of Arts, *Aquinas, Samuel Virenius, Ennegius, Herlandus, Stukius*, and Others, very worthy Men no Doubt, but who had very little Share in the Battles of your Hero, in his Triumphs, or his Defeats.

It may, perchance, be very important to *Europe* to be inform'd, that the Chapel of the Castle at *Stockholm*, burnt fifty Years ago, (*idem*) was in the new Wing on the North Side, and that there were two Paintings of the Intendant *Kloker's*, which are at present hung up in *St Nicholas' Church* ; that the Pews were cover'd with Blue on Sermon-Days ; that they were made, some of Oak, and others of Wall-nut ; (b) and that instead of grand Lustres, there were little flat Candlesticks, that could not fail of producing a very fine Effect ; that there were four Statues in Plaster of *Paris*, and that their Pedestals were black and white.

We will farther persuade our selves, (c) that it is of the last Consequence, to be thoroughly inform'd, that there was no mix'd Gold in the Coverture made use of at the Coronation of *Charles XII.* to know, that it was as large as a Canopy ; whether 'twas
with

(a) *Pag. 9, of the Hist. of Charles XII. by Norberg. Cusson's Edit.*

(b) *Pag. 24.*

(c) *Pag. 31, 32.*

with scarlet, or blue, Cloth the Church was lined; and of what Height the Benches were. All this may have its Merit with Those, who would willingly be instructed in the Interests of Princes.

You tell us, after a Detail of all these grand Matters, at what o'Clock *Charles XII.* was crown'd: but not a Tittle of the Reasons, why the Diadem encircled his Brows, before he arrived at the Age, prescribed by the Laws; why the Regency was taken out of the Hands of the Queen-Mother; how the famous Count *Piper* obtain'd the Confidence of the King; what then was the Strength of *Sweden*; what Number of Inhabitants she had; what were her Alliances, Government, Necessities, and the Shifts she had, to supply them.

You have given us Part of *M. Alderfeld's* Military Journal: but, Sir, a Journal is no more a History, than Materials for Building are a House. Permit me to tell you, that History does not consist in a Recital of little Facts, in producing of Manifestos, Replies, Rejoinders &c. 'Tis not in this Manner, that *Q. Curtius* compos'd his History of *Alexander*; or *Livy* and *Tacitus* wrote the *Roman* History. There are a thousand Journalists in the World; when we have scarce two or three modern Historians. It were to be wish'd, that all those, who grind Colours, would bestow them on some Painter, in order to his producing a masterly Picture.

You are not ignorant, that *Monf. de Voltaire* had publish'd the following Declaration, which your Translator recites.

"(a) I love Truth, as I have propos'd no other End, or Interest to myself, but to arrive at the Knowledge of it. The Places, in my History of *Charles XII.* where I find I have been deceived, shall be alter'd. 'Tis very natural for *M. Norberg*, as he is a *Swede*, and was an Eye-Witness, to be better qualified, than I could be, who am a Foreigner. I will take a Review of my Memoirs, and shall be vastly pleas'd to correct my Mistakes."

Observe, Sir, with what Politeness *Monf. de Voltaire* speaks of you, and with what Modesty he perus'd your Work; tho' he had received his own Materials from the Hands of several Ambassadors, and even Part of them from more than one Crown'd Head.

You have replied, Sir, to this *French* Politeness, in a Manner, that favours a little of the *Gothic* Taste.

You, say, in your Preface, (b) that the History, publish'd by *M. de Voltaire*, is not worth Translating; altho' it has been render'd almost into all the Tongues of *Europe*; and no less than Eight Editions of an *English* Translation of it have been printed at *London*. You afterwards add very politely, that a *Puffendorf* would treat him, like *Varillas*, as an Arch-Liar.

To

(a) Pag. 13. of *Cusson's Edit.* in 4to.

(b) *Ibid.*

To give Proofs of this so complaisant Supposition, you do not fail to insert, in the Margin of your Work, all the principal Faults, into which he is fallen.

You expressly remark, that Major General *Stuart*, did not receive a small Wound on his Shoulder, as the *French* Author has, without any Foundation, advanced, on the Credit of a *German* Writer: it being only, say you, a some-what large Contusion. 'Tis undeniable, that *Monf. de Voltaire* has given a faithful Relation of the Battle of *Narva*, which suggested, to him at least, an interesting Description. 'Tis notorious, that he is the only Writer, who has been so bold as to affirm, that *Charles XII.* fought this Battle of *Narva* with only Eight thousand Men. All other Historians give him Twenty Thousand. He follow'd Probability: and *Monf. de Voltaire* is the first, who has spoke the Truth in this important Article. In the mean time you call him Arch-Liar; because he asserts, that General *Liewen* wore a laced scarlet Coat at the Siege of *Tborn*: and take him up for this enormous Error, declaring positively, that the Lace was not upon a scarlet Ground.

But, Sir, You, who, in Things of this weighty Nature, so lavishly bestow the fine Name of Arch-Liar, not only on a Man, who is a singular Lover of Truth, but on all other Historians, that have given us the History of *Charles XII.* pray, what Name do you deserve, after the Letter, you tell us the *Grand Seigneur* wrote to this Monarch?

(a) "We *Sultan Bassa*, to King *Charles XII.* by the Grace of " God, King of the *Swedes*, and the *Gotbs*, Health, &c."

You, who have been among the *Turks*, and seem to have learnt of them a very indifferent Management of Terms, how could their Stile escape you? What *Turkish* Emperor was ever call'd, *Sultan Bassa*? What Letter of the *Divan* ever began in that Manner? What Prince ever wrote to another, that he would send Ambassadors Plenipotentiary, on the first Occasion, in order to be inform'd of the Circumstances of a Battle? What Letter of the *Grand Seigneur's* ever ended with this Expression, *To the Care of God*? In fine, where have you ever seen a Dispatch from *Constantinople*, dated the Year of the Creation, and not that of the *Hegira*? The *Iman* of the august *Sultan*, who penn'd the History of this great Emperor, and of the sublime *Vizirs*, could object to you gross Injuries, if the Politeness of the *Ottoman* Nation would leave him at Liberty so to do.

Does it become you, after producing a Piece, like this, which cost the Baron *Puffendorf* so much Labour, to charge one with Lying, about a Scarlet Coat?

Are

Are you, on other Occasions, a zealous Partizan for Truth, when you suppress the rigorous Hardships, exercised by the Chamber of Liquidations, under *Charles XI*? When you affect to forget, in speaking of Count *Parkul*, that he had defended the Rights of the *Livonians*, with which he was charged : these same *Livonians*, that breathe, at present, under the sweet Authority of the illustrious *Semiramis* of the North? This Conduct is not only betraying the Truth, Sir : but also betraying the Cause of Mankind. 'Tis to be wanting to your renown'd Country, Patron of Liberty, and declared Enemy to all Manner of Oppression.

Cease then to throw out so lavishly, in your Treatise, such *Vandal* and *Gothic* Epithets on Those, whose Business it is to compile History : nor any longer authorize the barbarous Pedantry, which you impute to this *Puffendorff*.

Are you aware, that this same *Puffendorff* is an Author sometimes as incorrect, as he is esteem'd? Do you know, that we give him the reading, in as much as he is the only Writer of his Time, that is supportable? Understand you, that Those, whom you obligingly call Arch-Liars, would have had Reason to blush, if they had not been better qualified for writing the History of the World, than this *Puffendorff* of your's was? Do you know, that *M. de la Martiniere* has corrected more than a thousand Faults, in the last Edition of his Book?

Let us open, at hap-hazard, this Book so well known. I light on the Article of the Popes. He says, speaking of *Julius II*, that *he left behind him, as well as Alexander VI, a shameful Character*. In the mean while, the *Italians* revere the Memory of *Julius II* : they see in him a great Man, who, after having been at the Head of four Conclaves, and commanded Armies, pursued to his Death the magnificent Design of driving the Barbarians out of *Italy*. He was a Lover of all Kinds of Arts : he laid the Foundation of that Church, which is the finest Piece of Building this Day in the Universe. He encouraged Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, at the same time, that he was rekindling, what had been long extinct, the Valour of the *Romans*. The *Italians*, with a good deal of Reason, have the utmost Contempt of the ridiculous Method, which most Writers, beyond the *Alps*, have of penning the History of their Popes. 'Tis necessary to know how to distinguish the Pontiff from the Sovereign : 'tis requisite to know how to have a great Esteem for Popes, tho' a Mau be born at *Stockholm* : one ought to call to mind that Saying of the Great *Cornus* of *Medicis*, viz. *That States are not govern'd by Pater-Nosters*. In a word, one ought to be of no Country, and entirely disengaged from all Party Spirit, when one writes History.

I find, in opening again *Puffendorff*'s Work, in the Article of Queen *Mary* of England, Daughter to *Henry VIII*, that *she could not be acknowledged as legitimate, without the Pope's Authority*.

M

Wha:

What Blundering is here? She had been recognized by the Parliament. And, after that, how come she to stand in need of being legitimated at *Rome*; especially, as *Rome* neither ought, nor would be prevail'd on, to dissolve the Marriage of her Mother?

I am reading the Article of *Charles V*: I see, that *before the Year 1516 Charles V. had ever before his Eyes his* NEC PLUS ULTRA: but, at that time, he was but fifteen Years of Age; and this Motto was not thought of till a considerable Space after.

Shall this Slip put us upon calling *Puffendorff* an Arch-Liar? No: we will own, that, in a Work of such an Extent, 'tis very pardonable to have committed a Mistake: and beseech you, Sir, to be more exact yourself; better acquainted, than you are, with the Stile of the *Turks*; more polite, in regard of the *French* Nation; and in short, more equitable, and more sharp-sighted, in respect of the Choice you make of Materials, in order to compose an History.

'Tis a Misfortune, inseparable from the Good, which Printing has produced, that such a Number of scandalous Pieces should be publish'd; to the Shame of Wit, and Morality. Where-ever is a Multitude of Writers, there will be numerous Libels. These wretched Performances, taking their Rise frequently in *France*, travel into the North; in the same Manner as our indifferent Wines are sold there for Burgundy and Champagne. The one is drank; the others are read with much about the same Delicacy of Taste. But Men, of real Discernment, know how to reject what meets with no Approbation in *France*.

You quote, Sir, two Pieces, by no means worthy the Acquaintance of a Chaplain to *Charles XII*. One is the *Volteromanie*; the Other, an I don't know what *Factum* of a Bookseller, against *Monf. de Voltaire*.

Your Translator, *M. Walmoth*, has had the Equity to remark in his Notes, that this *Volteromanie* is one of those immoral and dark Satyrs, which a Man of Honour and Probity is not allow'd to cite. He attacks you, at least, on occasion of this wrong Conduct. Here then, Sir, since you bring it on the Stage, is the whole Matter of Fact.

A *French* Writer, who was under, as all Men of Letters can attest, the greatest, and most solemn, Obligations to *Monf. de Voltaire*, had the Misfortune to be suspected (and I verily believe without Foundation) to have push'd his Venom and Ingratitude so far, as to compose this scandalous Piece. But he disown'd it publicly at *Paris* before the Civil Magistrate: and this Denial, sign'd by his own Hand, was printed in all the Gazettes. Observe, amongst others, That of *Amsterdam*, of Tuesday, May 19, 1741. I should adjudge it a great Dishonour to me, says he, should I have had the least Hand in this infamous Libel: these are his own Words.

Judge

Judge then, what Glory is to be reap'd from quoting this Performance, which even such a Writer, as he, is ashamed to own.

We think it also our Duty to let you into the Authentickness of this Bookseller's *Factum*; as you again cite it, very consistently with the Work in hand, that of writing the History of *Charles XII. King of Sweden*.

How strange so ever it may seem to muster up, in this Place, such insignificant Names, yet one can't help following the Path you have chalk'd out. And, since in the History of a King of *Sweden*, you have made use of a Scrap of a Merchant's Process at *Rouen*, in order to sully the Reputation of a Man of Letters at *Paris*, indulge Men of Letters, better acquainted with the Circumstances of the Affair, than you are, in the Liberty of appearing in his Defence.

You are not ignorant, that Writers are often as jealous of one another, as Princes are. But whoever the Author was, that put this Bookseller on publishing the *Factum*, which you speak of, it will not be foreign to the present Purpose to let you know, that it was condemn'd and suppress'd judicially; and consequently, no very proper Incident to be introduced in the History of a Monarch.

I am now going to shew you, Sir, that it frequently happens, no more Credit is to be given to Printed Pieces, in the Affairs of particular Persons, than there is in the Negotiations carried on between Sovereign Princes. And, for the same Reason, as all the *Universalia*, and Heap of Manifestos, which serve to render a Work bulky, don't let us into the Bottom of Matters, and the Springs of Politicks; so these Libels, that are dispersed abroad, whether under the Name of *Factum*, or that of Remarks, Observations, &c. and all the Satyrical Extracts, with which such a Number of Journals are very scandalously stuff'd, cannot contribute in the least to the forming a just Idea of any Man's Character. To demonstrate this to you, be so good as to cast an Eye upon the Letter, sent to *Monf. de Voltaire*, from this same Bookseller, some time after the Process you mention: it is from *Paris*, dated the 30th of *December*, 1738. 'Tis publish'd for an Example, and at the same time, to do Honour to him, who had the Courage, of his own Accord, to repair the Damage, which Others had done of making Use of his Name. It is as follows: " Sir, I beg of
 " you to excuse the bad State of my Circumstances, and the
 " Seizing of all my Papers; which has debarr'd me, till now,
 " from reflecting on the vile Proceeding of those, who, taking
 " Advantage of the ill Situation of my Affairs, forced me, by
 " imposing on me, to carry on an unjust Process against you, and
 " to consent to the Printing an odious *Factum*. I entirely disown
 " them Both. The Malice of your Enemy has only been the
 " Means of my being the better acquainted with the Goodness
 " of your Character. I pray, you will have so much Goodness
 " at

" at least as to pardon me for having listen'd to such evil Coun-
 " sels: I solemnly and sacredly protest to you, that, the very
 " Moment I had the Unhappiness to be persuaded to act so un-
 " worthily in your Regard, I was touch'd with the deepest Sor-
 " row. I am now thoroughly sensible how much they deceived me.
 " You are not at all ignorant of the Villany of him, who advised
 " me to it. Behold how far that was carried: I was made an
 " Instrument to blacken you. I am under so much Concern, that
 " I promise I will never more see those, who have compell'd
 " me to take this base Step: and I will repair the extreme Injury
 " by the constant Attachment, which I now eternally vow to
 " you, as to my ancient Benefactor. I beseech you, Sir, to vouch-
 " safe me your Benevolence, and to be firmly persuaded, that my
 " Heart never participated of the Malice, which has been so glar-
 " ing in your Enemies. Yes; 'tis my Heart alone, that influences
 " me to make this Declaration. And I have the Honour to be,
 " with the profoundest Respect, Sir, your most humble and most
 " obedient Servant. *Paris, Dec. 30, 1738.*

If this Letter be not sufficient, Sir, to discredit the infamous
 Works, you have fondly laid such a Stress upon, in your Preface
 we will produce others of still greater Weight. You see a Man
 asking Pardon for the very Fault, you quote as an Authority; and
 that without Blushing for so doing. Be not you ashamed, Sir, to
 be sorry for your little Inadvertencies. It is hard: but still it is a
 fine Thing, to acknowledge one's Faults.

F I N I S.

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